



Work Experience and Work-Based Learning



This brief summarizes evidence from the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse about interventions that provide **work experience** or a combination of **work and work-based learning** (hereafter, we refer to these as work experience and work-based learning). These are two related strategies for helping people with low incomes improve employment and earnings outcomes.

Interventions that use **work experience** often require clients to work and offer clients paid or unpaid work, such as internships or community service jobs.¹ Interventions that use **work and work-based learning** offer clients paid or unpaid work or learning experiences in a work setting. Typically, work-based learning integrates education or job training with work to enhance clients' skills. Paid work-based learning experiences might be subsidized, meaning that an organization other than the employer pays at least some of a worker's wages. Because interventions providing work experience are a subset of work and work-based learning interventions, this brief summarizes the evidence on both of these types of interventions. Although some of the interventions discussed in this Evidence Snapshot provided subsidized work, the studies characterize these experiences as "internships" or "community service jobs." Interventions that primarily offered subsidized employment or transitional jobs are discussed in a separate Evidence Snapshot (https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/pathways_publications/subsidized-employment-and-transitional-jobs).

State government agencies, local nonprofits, and workforce agencies administer work experience and work-based learning interventions.

What do we mean by work experience and work-based learning?

This snapshot reports on interventions with a primary service of work experience or a combination of work and work-based learning. The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse defines work experience as work that is paid or unpaid, such as internships or community service jobs. It defines work and work-based learning as any paid or unpaid work or learning experiences that occur in a work setting.

What are Evidence Snapshots?

Evidence Snapshots are short briefs on the effectiveness of programs that use a specific approach to service provision. These briefs draw on interventions that the Pathways Clearinghouse has reviewed. They summarize what we know about programs that use a specific service (such as work experience or work and work-based learning) or a common service-delivery strategy (such as career pathways).

What is the Pathways Clearinghouse?

The Pathways Clearinghouse identifies interventions that aim to improve employment and earnings outcomes for populations with low incomes, especially public benefits recipients. The Pathways Clearinghouse conducts a transparent, comprehensive search for studies of such interventions, rates the quality of those studies to assess the strength of the evidence they provide, and determines the evidence of effectiveness for the studied interventions.

For more information, visit the Pathways Clearinghouse website: <https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/>.

Program staff, such as case managers, typically lead work readiness activities, such as job clubs or job training workshops, and help clients secure internships or other work experiences. Clients often continue to receive services while participating in these work experiences.

Generally, this snapshot includes two types of interventions that provided work experience and work-based learning as the primary service. First, several interventions required clients to work if they received public benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children). These interventions emphasized securing any employment as quickly as possible while encouraging clients to continue searching for a full-time paid job. Although federal work requirements for TANF allow clients to pursue other activities, such as education and training or work readiness activities, instead of working, these interventions specifically required clients to work in order to continue receiving public benefits. Many of these interventions were implemented in the context of welfare reform in the 1990s.² The second type of intervention that provided work experience and work-based learning as the primary service offered soft skills training and internships to young adults on a voluntary basis.

What does the evidence say?

The Pathways Clearinghouse identified seven interventions in which work experience and work-based learning were the primary focus of the intervention, or the primary service. These interventions were each examined in at least one high- or moderate-rated study that examined employment, earnings, public benefit receipt, or education and training outcomes.³ This Evidence Snapshot summarizes 16 studies of these 7 interventions that were conducted between 1991 and 2013, and published through May 2022, and that the Pathways Clearinghouse reviewed.⁴

For this snapshot, the Pathways Clearinghouse considered earnings, employment, and public benefit receipt, and education and training findings in both the short term (18 or fewer months) and long term (between 18 months and 5 years). In looking across these studies, we observe the following:



Short-term annual earnings increased by \$649, and long-term annual earnings increased by \$713, on average, across the 6 work experience and work-based learning interventions for which these outcomes were examined. Three work experience and work-based learning interventions increased clients' earnings in the short term or long term. One of these interventions increased earnings in the short term only, and two interventions increased earnings in the long term but not the short term.⁵



Short-term employment increased by three percentage points, and long-term employment increased by four percentage points, on average, across the five work experience and work based-learning interventions for which these outcomes were examined. Three interventions increased employment in the short and long term, and one intervention improved employment in the long term but not the short term.



On average, the proportion of people receiving public benefits and the amount of annual public benefits they received did not change across the five work experience and work based-learning interventions for which these outcomes were examined. One intervention reduced the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the short term but not the long term. There is no evidence that any of the interventions reduced the amount of benefits people received in the short or long term.⁶



Most studies of work experience and work based-learning interventions did not assess effects on education and training attainment; therefore, we do not know whether work experience and work-based learning interventions affect these outcomes.⁷ Across the two interventions for which these outcomes were examined, there is no evidence that either intervention increased educational attainment.



Three interventions improved more than one type of outcome domain. One work experience and work based-learning intervention had positive effects on three outcome domains examined by the Pathways Clearinghouse. The [Welfare Restructuring Project \(WRP\) \(as compared with WRP Incentives Only\)](#) improved earnings, employment, and public benefit receipt outcomes. In addition, the [Welfare Restructuring Project \(WRP\)](#) and [Young Adult Internship Program \(YAIP\)](#) improved employment and earnings outcomes. The two WRP interventions served TANF recipients in Vermont during welfare reform, while YAIP served young adults in New York City.

How does the Pathways Clearinghouse assess if an intervention is effective?

The Pathways Clearinghouse assigned an evidence of effectiveness rating to each intervention in each of four outcome domains: earnings, employment, public benefit receipt, and education and training. Most of the domains are broken into short (18 or fewer months) and long (between 18 months and 5 years) term because we expect the interventions might have different effects in different time periods. The education and training domain is not broken into time periods because after you obtain a degree, you cannot lose it in the future. The evidence of effectiveness rating describes whether the intervention is likely to produce favorable results in that domain if faithfully replicated with a similar population. If an intervention had no evidence to assess support in any domain, we excluded it from this brief.

There are six ratings:

- ★ *Well-supported* means there are at least two moderate- or high-quality studies with favorable findings.
- ⬆️ *Supported* means there is one moderate- or high-quality study with favorable findings.
- ⊖ *Mixed support* means there is some evidence that the intervention improves outcomes and some evidence the intervention worsens outcomes.
- ✖️ *Not supported* means moderate- or high-quality studies did not find any favorable results.
- ⊖ *Insufficient evidence to assess support* means there are moderate- and high-quality studies but we cannot assign one of the other ratings.
- *No evidence to assess support* means there are no moderate- or high-quality studies.

No work experience and work-based learning interventions received the well-supported rating in the outcome domains of interest to the Pathways Clearinghouse. Four work experience and work-based learning interventions received a supported rating in at least one outcome domain.

Evaluations compared the outcomes of study participants in the intervention group to the outcomes of participants in a comparison group who were not offered the intervention but who might have received alternative services. People in the comparison group either had access to (1) a less-intensive version of services (about 85 percent of the studies examining work experience and work-based learning interventions) or (2) other services provided by the organization or available in the community (about 15 percent of the studies examining work experience and work-based learning interventions).⁸

How does the Pathways Clearinghouse calculate the average effect of an intervention?

For this brief, the Pathways Clearinghouse calculated the average effect for each domain by averaging effects within moderate- and high-quality studies, then within interventions, and then across interventions that use work experience and work-based learning. The average includes all studies, not just those with a supported rating or statistically significant findings, because these studies still provide useful evidence in considering the overall effectiveness of work experience and work-based learning. We show the average and not the median because, for the most part, there are no outliers skewing the average.⁹

What makes an effect large?









The Pathways Clearinghouse classifies an effect as large if its corresponding effect size is more than 0.25 standard deviations. The effect size is the strength of the effect measured in standard units (that is, standard deviations). In 2018, an increase in annual earnings of \$5,229 would have an effect size of about 0.25.

What interventions provide work experience and work-based learning as their primary service?

The Pathways Clearinghouse defines an intervention as a specific bundle of services or policies implemented in a given context. Exhibit 1 alphabetically lists and describes the seven interventions for which work experience and work-based learning were the primary service. This exhibit includes informa-

tion about the populations served by each intervention, the setting where the intervention was provided (whether it was in urban, rural, or mixed settings), and when the evaluation was conducted. It also contains the highest effectiveness rating for each domain.

Exhibit 1. Work experience and work-based learning interventions and their effectiveness by domain^a

Intervention description	Primary service ^b	Populations and employment barriers ^c	Settings ^d	Year evaluation began	Increase earnings	Increase employment	Decrease public benefit receipt ^e	Increase education and training
<p>Minnesota Tier 2 Sought to increase workforce participation for long-term TANF recipients who were still not working after participating in Tier 1, the existing welfare-to-work program. Clients had access to education or job training programs but were required to work 20 hours per week concurrently with participation in such programs and, if they remained unemployed after 6 weeks, were placed in unpaid employment or supported employment paired with job coaching or on-the-job training.</p>	Work and work-based learning	Cash assistance recipients, Long-term Cash assistance recipients, People who were unemployed, Parents, Single parents	Urban only	2002				
<p>Riverside Labor Force Attachment (LFA) Program (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development [HCD] Program) Focused on rapid job placement for single-parent AFDC recipients to promote self-sufficiency by encouraging clients to move quickly into work without being selective about which job to take. This evaluation directly compared LFA to a separate intervention called HCD in order to better understand which of the two interventions might be more effective; the distinctive features of LFA were rapid job placement and an emphasis on building work-related skills.</p>	Work experience	Cash assistance recipients, Parents, Single parents	Urban only	1991				

 well-supported
  supported
  mixed support
  not supported
  insufficient evidence
  no evidence

Intervention description	Primary service ^b	Populations and employment barriers ^c	Settings ^d	Year evaluation began	Increase earnings	Increase employment	Decrease public benefit receipt ^e	Increase education and training
<p>★ well-supported ⬆ supported ⚖ mixed support ✖ not supported ⚪ insufficient evidence ○ no evidence</p>								
<p><u>Urban Alliance’s High School Internship Program</u> Aimed to prevent high school seniors from becoming disconnected from higher education and the workforce through a paid internship program bundled with pre-work basic job training, continued soft-skill and job-specific training, mentorship, and access to services for program alumni.</p>	Work experience	Young adults (ages 16–24), People with less than high school diploma or GED	Urban only	2011	○	○	○	⚪
<p><u>Virginia Independence Program (VIP) with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW)^f</u> Changed the eligibility requirements for families receiving AFDC/TANF benefits and emphasized rapid reemployment, and economic self-sufficiency. It required clients to sign an agreement of personal responsibility, begin job searching immediately, and obtain employment or participate in a community work experience program.</p>	Work experience	Cash assistance recipients	Tested in multiple settings	1995	✖	⬆	⚖	○
<p><u>Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP)^g</u> Created a work requirement for single parents and for two-parent families with a disabled or unemployed parent receiving cash assistance. Placed clients in subsidized community service employment if they remained unemployed after 15 or 30 months. It also provided financial incentives to work, with a goal of encouraging employment and reducing reliance on welfare.</p>	Work experience	Cash assistance recipients, People who were unemployed, Parents, Single parents	Tested in multiple settings	1994	⬆	⬆	⚪	○
<p><u>Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)^h</u> The WRP created a work requirement and provided financial incentives to work for single parents and two-parent families with a disabled or unemployed parent receiving cash assistance. This evaluation directly compared the WRP with a separate intervention, WRP Incentives Only, to better understand which of the two interventions might be more effective; the distinctive feature of the WRP was the work requirement.</p>	Work experience	Cash assistance recipients, Parents, Single parents	Tested in multiple settings	1994	⬆	⬆	⬆	○

Intervention description	Primary service ^b	Populations and employment barriers ^c	Settings ^d	Year evaluation began	Increase earnings	Increase employment	Decrease public benefit receipt ^e	Increase education and training
★ well-supported ⬆ supported ⚖ mixed support ✖ not supported ⚪ insufficient evidence ○ no evidence								
Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) Provided internships and work-related services to young adults who were not working or in school in order to encourage work.	Work experience	Young adults (ages 16–24)	Urban only	2013	⬆	⬆	○	⚪

Table notes:

^a To make the results easier to view in this Exhibit, the effectiveness ratings represent the highest rating given to the short-term, long-term or very-long term outcomes for that intervention. For example, if an intervention has a supported effectiveness rating in the long-term for earnings, but not in the short-term or very-long term, we will display the ⬆ supported icon for the earnings domain.

^b An intervention's primary service is the principal service of the intervention. The primary service is (1) a component that a large proportion of intervention group members received and a large proportion of comparison group members did not and (2) the component that was described by the study authors as most integral to the theory of change tested by the study. Interventions may provide multiple services, but only one service is designated as primary.

^c Populations and employment barriers are listed if authors described all intervention participants as having the characteristic or if the characteristic was an eligibility requirement.

^d The settings indicate whether the study or studies of an intervention were conducted in urban, rural, or multiple settings.

^e The decrease public benefit receipt ratings in this table are from the [Pathways Clearinghouse](#) website and combine outcomes related to the proportion of people receiving public benefits and the amount of public benefits received.

^f Virginia Independence Program (VIP) with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) measured effects on long-term public benefit amount but did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size. Therefore, VIP with VIEW is not included in the average calculation or the long-term public benefit amount graphs in this report.

^g The Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) intervention only considers the comparison of the WRP group to the group of people who received Aid to Needy Families with Children (ANFC), which was considered business as usual. The evaluation also tested the effectiveness of a variation of the WRP that included work incentives but no work requirement, as well as a comparison of the WRP and the incentives-only variation.

^h The Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) measured public benefit amount but did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size. Therefore, the WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) is not included in the average calculation or the public benefit amount graphs in this report.

AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children; HCD = Human Capital Development; LFA = Labor Force Attachment; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project.

How were the interventions implemented?

Understanding how interventions were implemented is crucial to deciding whether an intervention is likely to have a similar effect in another community. Among the interventions examined, public-sector organizations, such as state human services or TANF agencies, implemented work experience and work-based learning interventions more often than local nonprofits or workforce agencies.

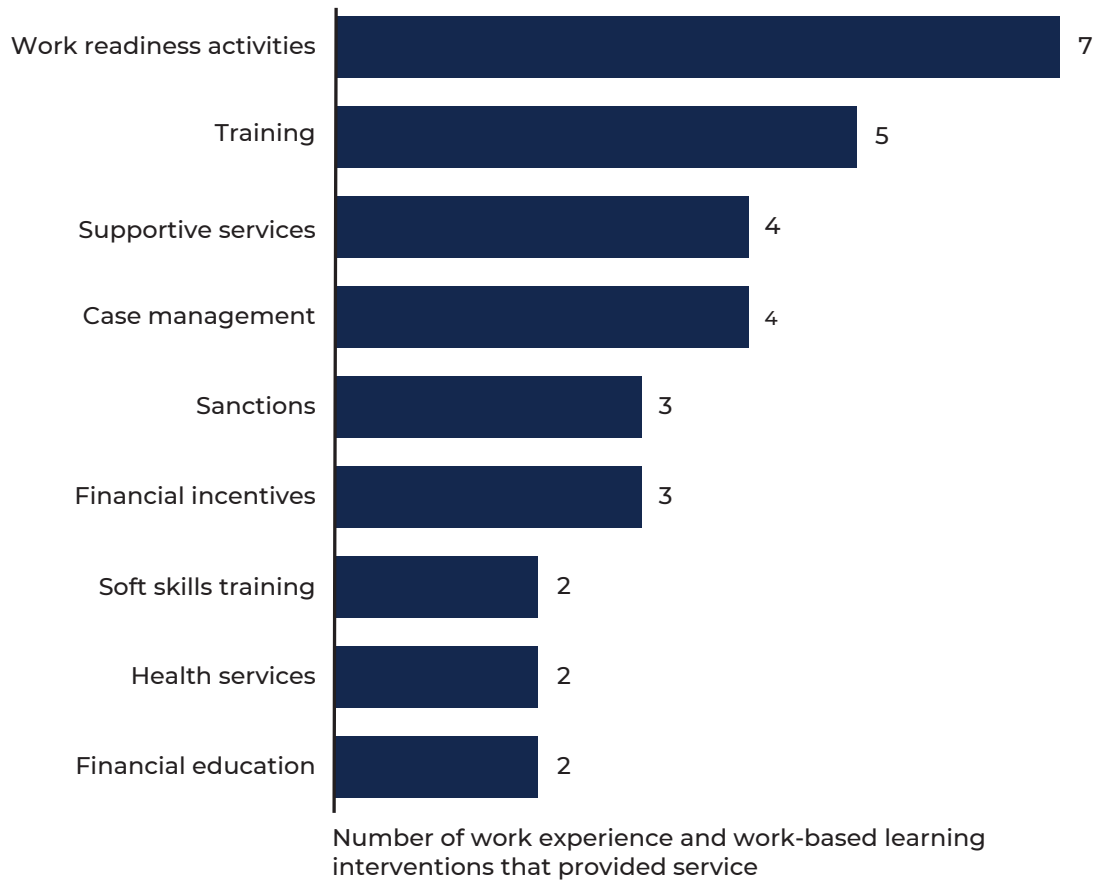
Two of the interventions were voluntary and provided job training and internships to young adults. The other 5 interventions were mandatory, and 4 of them required clients to work to access public benefits after a job search period that lasted from 6 weeks to 30 months. The four interventions that required work encouraged clients to secure work on their own and also offered work placements if they failed to secure work. Although they prioritized paid work experience, some interventions also placed clients in unpaid work experience.¹⁰ For example, Minnesota Tier 2 had limited funding for supported employment and placed clients who did not secure work on their own in either unpaid employment or supported employment in which their paid employment was paired with job coaching or on-the-job training. Supported employment refers to jobs in which workers receive supervision and support from trained program staff in addition to support from their employer. The fifth mandatory intervention, Riverside Labor Force Attachment (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development), encouraged clients to secure work on their own without directly placing clients in work experiences.

Clients were required to participate in program services to remain eligible for public benefits, and program staff encouraged them to move quickly into work while receiving education, training, and job development assistance.


The length of the interventions varied, but most consisted of a short training or job search period of about one to two months, followed by work experience of up to one year. The populations, settings, and timing of work experience and work-based learning interventions also varied (Exhibit 1). Clients of work experience and work-based learning interventions were people receiving cash assistance, parents (often single parents), or young adults. Four work experience and work-based learning interventions were tested in urban settings, and three have been tried in multiple settings. Four of the evaluations of work experience and work-based learning interventions began in the 1990s, one began in the 2000s, and two began after 2010. The Pathways Clearinghouse website (<https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/>) includes more detail about each intervention.

All the work experience and work-based learning interventions examined were bundled with other policies or services (see Exhibit 2). For example, they all also provided work readiness activities, such as job development or job search assistance. Five of the interventions provided training, four provided supportive services, and four provided case management.

Exhibit 2. Other services offered with work experience and work-based learning, out of seven interventions¹¹



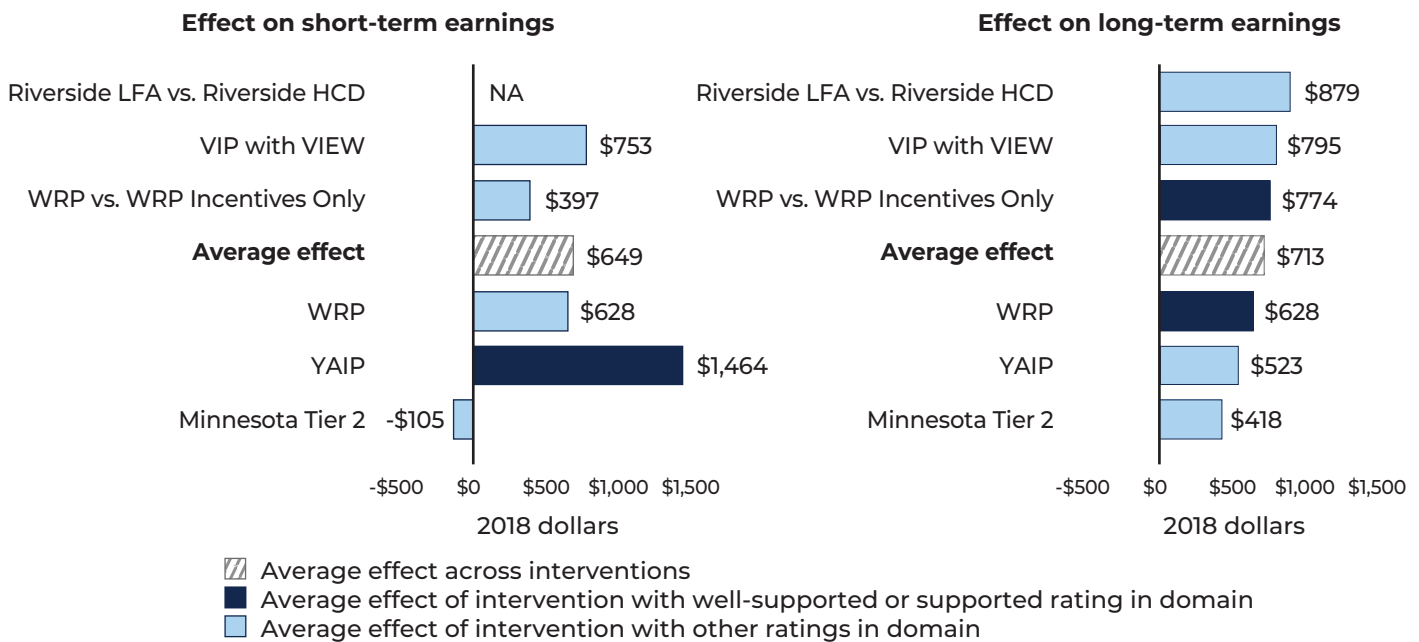
Do work experience and work-based learning interventions increase earnings?

 **Short-term annual earnings increased by \$649, and long-term annual earnings increased by \$713, on average, across the 6 work experience and work-based learning interventions that measured an effect on earnings, compared with comparison group earnings (Exhibit 3). Significant and favorable effects are noted in darker blue.**

Three of the six work experience and work-based learning interventions increased clients' annual earnings in the short term or long term, compared with comparison group earnings. YAIP increased annual earnings in the short term by \$1,464. Two interventions, WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) and WRP, increased earnings in the long term by \$774 and \$628, respectively.

Notably, both WRP and WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) received a supported rating for long-term earnings. These two evaluations examined the WRP which created a work requirement and provided a financial incentive to work. The evaluation of the WRP intervention compared clients to people in a comparison group who did not have a work requirement or a financial incentive to work, whereas the evaluation of WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) compared clients to clients assigned to a separate intervention, WRP Incentives Only, who received the financial incentives but not the work requirements associated with WRP. The findings suggest that the work requirement component drove increases in long-term earnings, rather than the financial incentives.

Exhibit 3. Work experience and work-based learning interventions, on average, increased short-term earnings and long-term earnings



Interventions are sorted according to the size of the long-term effects because long-term effects better represent sustained increases in economic self-sufficiency. Supported interventions, meaning interventions with research indicating significant and favorable effects, are noted in darker blue.

NA means an intervention did not measure outcomes at the specified time period.

Riverside LFA vs. Riverside HCD = Riverside Labor Force Attachment Program (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development Program); VIP with VIEW = Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare; WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project; WRP vs. WRP Incentives Only = Welfare Restructuring Project (as compared with Welfare Restructuring Project Incentives Only); YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.

Do work experience and work-based learning interventions increase employment?



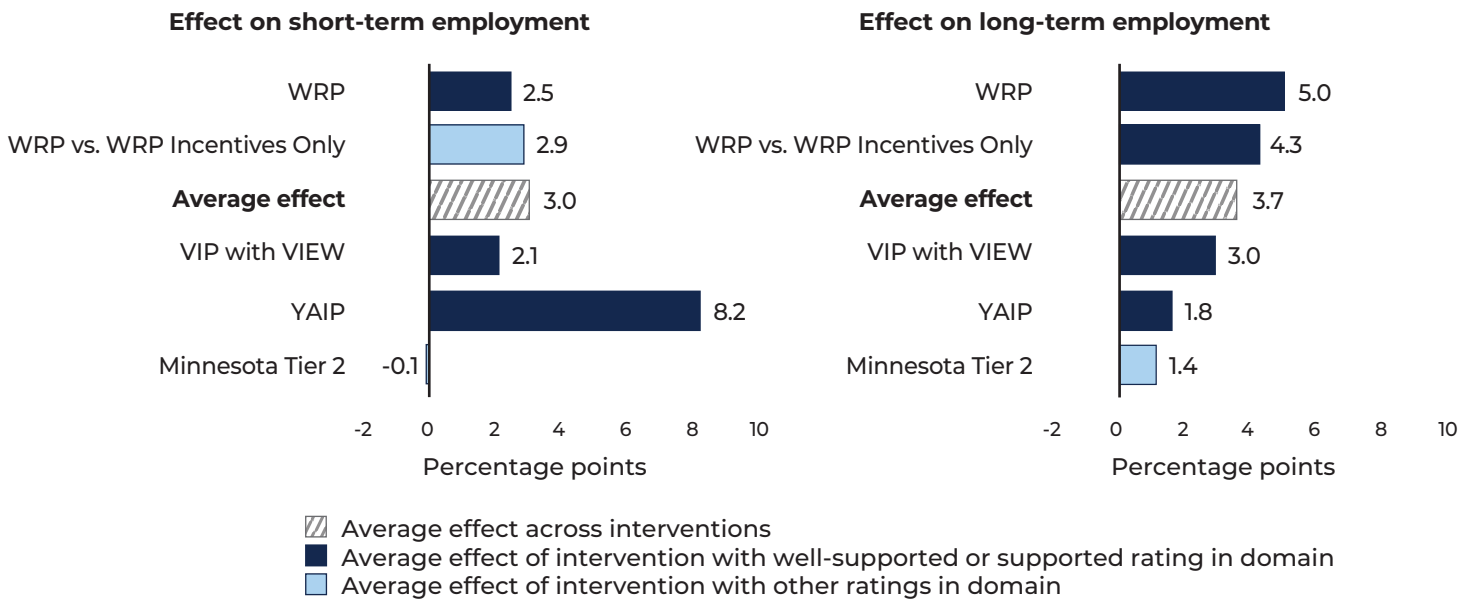
Short-term employment increased by three percentage points, and long-term employment increased by four percentage points, on average, across the five work

experience and work-based learning interventions that examined employment outcomes (Exhibit 4), compared with comparison group employment.

Three interventions increased employment in the short and long term, and one intervention improved employment in the long term only, compared

with comparison group employment. WRP, Virginia Independence Program (VIP) with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW), and YAIP all had favorable short-term and long-term effects. YAIP increased employment by 8.2 percentage points in the short term, and by 1.8 percentage points in the long term. WRP and VIP with VIEW had larger effects in the long term than in the short term. WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) increased employment by 4.3 percentage points in the long term, but did not increase employment in the short term.

Exhibit 4. Work experience and work-based learning, on average, improved short-term and long-term employment



Interventions are sorted according to the size of the long-term effects because long-term effects better represent sustained increases in economic self-sufficiency. Supported interventions, meaning interventions with research indicating significant and favorable effects, are noted in darker blue.

VIP with VIEW = Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare; WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project; WRP vs. WRP Incentives Only = Welfare Restructuring Project (as compared with Welfare Restructuring Project Incentives Only); YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.

Do work experience and work-based learning interventions decrease public benefit receipt?



Short-term and long-term public benefit receipt did not change, on average, relative to the comparison group. The Pathways

Clearinghouse examines participation in and amount of annual benefits received from public programs such as TANF, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income, and unemployment insurance. Five work experience and work-based learning interventions estimated effects on the proportion of people receiving public benefits (Exhibit 5), and five estimated effects on the amount of annual public benefits received (Exhibit 6).¹²

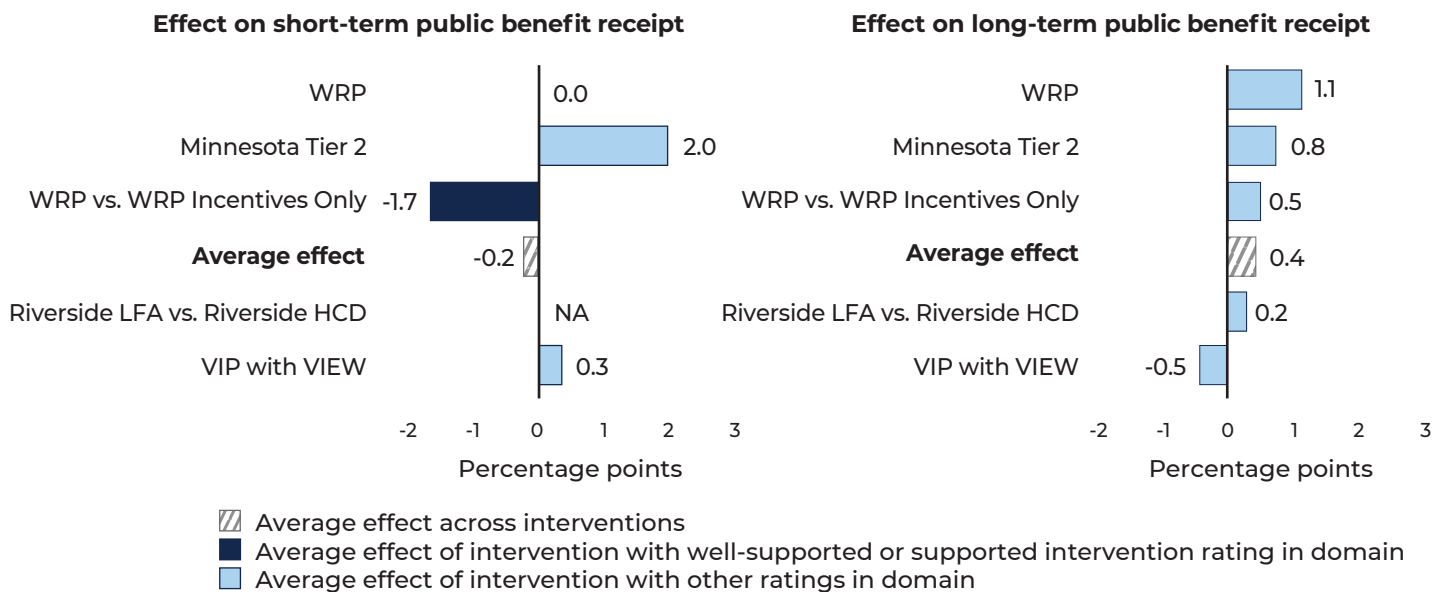
One intervention decreased the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the short term, relative to the comparison group. Across the research on interventions that measured the proportion of people

receiving public benefits, WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) was the only intervention that produced an effect in the short term (-1.7 percentage points). The effect reflects decreases in receipt of SNAP benefits. No interventions reduced the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the long term.

No work experience and work-based learning interventions significantly decreased the amount of annual public benefits received compared with the amount received by the comparison group.

Studies of five work experience and work-based learning interventions estimated effects on public benefit amount. None of the interventions for which there was enough information to calculate an effect size showed reductions in the amount of annual public benefits provided in the short or long term, relative to the comparison group.

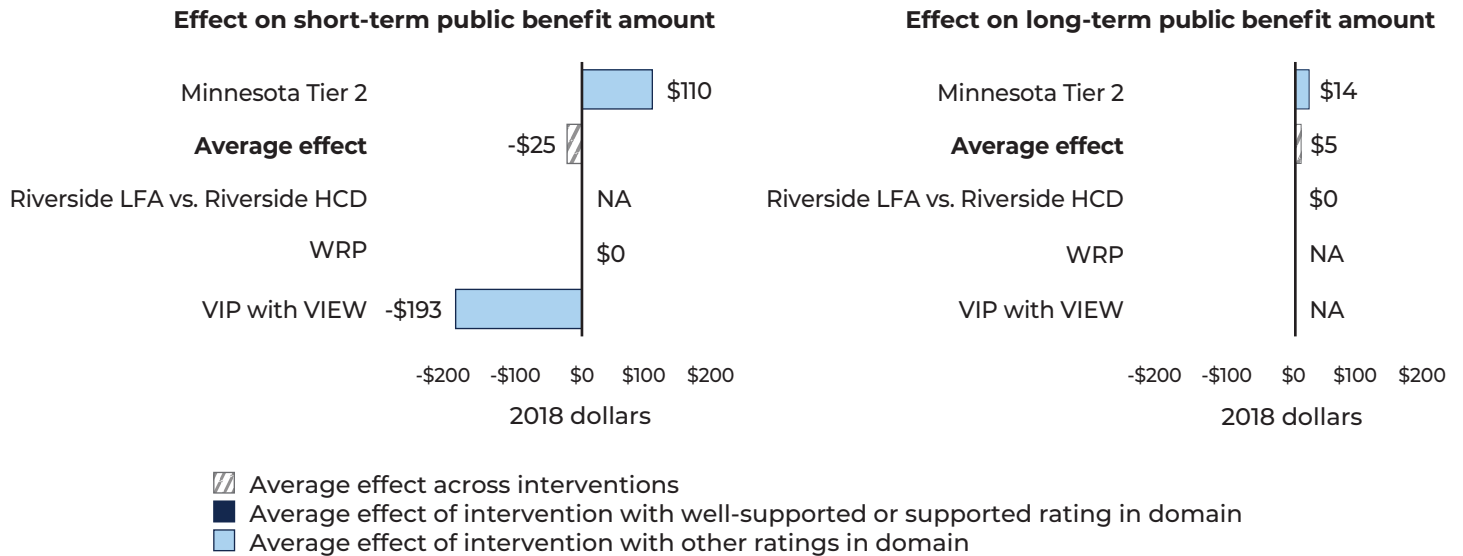
Exhibit 5. One work experience and work-based learning intervention decreased the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the short term but not the long term



Interventions are sorted according to the size of the long-term effects because long-term effects better represent sustained increases in economic self-sufficiency. Supported interventions, meaning interventions with research indicating significant and favorable effects, are noted in darker blue.

Riverside LFA vs. Riverside HCD = Riverside Labor Force Attachment Program (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development Program); VIP with VIEW = Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare; WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project; WRP vs. WRP Incentives Only = Welfare Restructuring Project (as compared with Welfare Restructuring Project Incentives Only); YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.

Exhibit 6. No work experience and work-based learning interventions affected the amount of public benefits received in the short or long term¹³



Interventions are sorted according to the size of the long-term effects because long-term effects better represent sustained increases in economic self-sufficiency. Supported interventions, meaning interventions with research indicating significant and favorable effects, are noted in darker blue.

NA means an intervention did not measure outcomes at the specified time period.

Welfare Restructuring Project and Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size for the amount of public benefits received in the long term. Therefore, these interventions are not included in the average calculation or the amount of public benefits graphs in the long term in this report.

WRP vs. WRP Incentives Only measured the amount of public benefits received in the short and long terms. However, WRP vs. WRP Incentives Only did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size. Therefore, this intervention is not included in the average calculation or Exhibit 6.

Riverside LFA vs. Riverside HCD = Riverside Labor Force Attachment Program (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development Program); VIP with VIEW = Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare; WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project; YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.

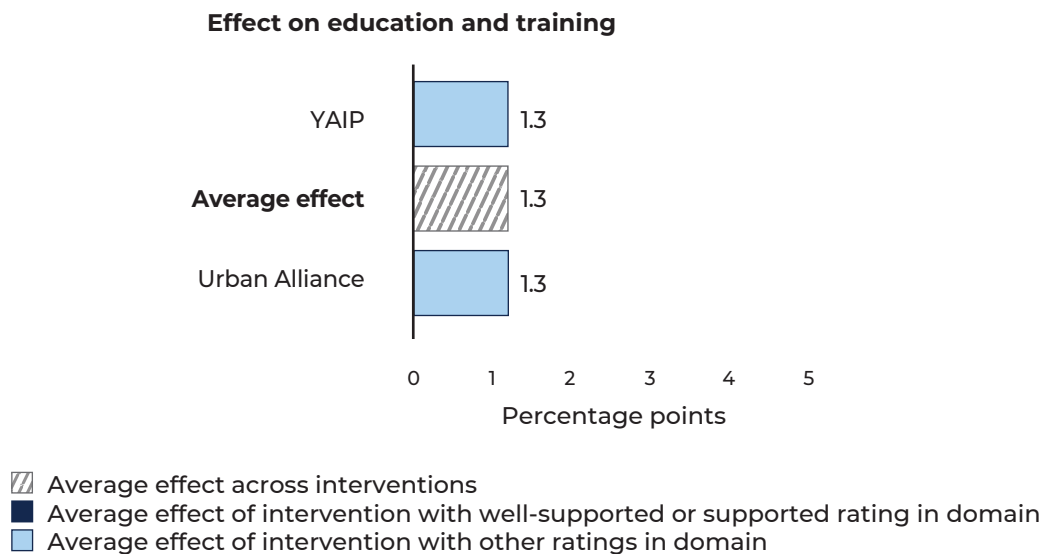
Do work experience and work-based learning interventions increase education and training attainment?



No work experience and work-based learning interventions significantly increased education and training attainment compared with comparison group education and training attainment. Only two studies of work experience and work-based learning interventions (YAIP and Urban Alliance) measured changes in education and

training attainment (Exhibit 7); those interventions did not receive a supported rating. Most studies of work experience and work-based learning interventions did not assess the effect on education and training, likely because this was not an explicit goal for most interventions. Therefore, we do not know whether most work experience and work-based learning interventions affected these outcomes.

Exhibit 7. No work experience and work-based learning interventions increased clients' education and training attainment



YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.

Which are the most effective work experience and work-based learning interventions?

Three work experience and work-based learning interventions had a favorable effect on two or more types of outcomes examined by the Pathways Clearinghouse. Of these, one intervention—WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)—had favorable effects on three outcome

domains examined by the Pathways Clearinghouse: earnings, employment, and public benefit receipt. Two other interventions—WRP and YAIP—had favorable effects on two domains (earnings and employment) (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8. Work experience and work-based learning interventions with favorable effects on more than one outcome

Intervention	Increase earnings		Increase employment		Decrease public benefit receipt		Increase education and training
	Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term	All time periods
WRP		↑	↑	↑			
WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)		↑		↑	↑		
YAIP	↑		↑	↑			

WRP = Welfare Restructuring Project; YAIP = Young Adult Internship Program.


All three interventions prioritized work experiences and offered subsidized work to clients who did not secure work on their own. WRP and WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) placed clients in subsidized, minimum-wage, community service employment if they were unemployed after receiving cash assistance for 15 months (for two-parent families) or 30 months (for single-parent families and two-parent families with a disabled parent). However, most participants secured nonsubsidized work on their own, so very few were placed in subsidized

community service employment. YAIP placed clients in paid internships for 10 to 12 weeks and provided follow-up services for 9 months after the internship ended.




WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) improved annual long-term earnings (\$774) and long-term employment (4 percentage points) (Exhibit 9). This intervention also decreased public benefit receipt in the short term (-\$138).

Exhibit 9. Effects in 2018 dollars for WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) in three domains





Increase earnings

	Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)
Short-term	  \$397 per year
Long-term	  \$774 per year

Increase employment

	Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)
Short-term	  3% (in percentage points)
Long-term	  4% (in percentage points)

Decrease public benefit receipt^a

	Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)
Short-term	  -\$138 per year
Long-term	  \$39 per year

^a The Pathways Clearinghouse considered the proportion of people receiving public benefits and public benefit amount together based on effect sizes and assigned them a single, combined effectiveness rating. As a result, the effects shown here represent a combined effect in dollars across the proportion of people receiving public benefits and public benefit amount.

Several features distinguished the WRP (as compared with the WRP Incentives Only) intervention. As a condition of receiving cash assistance, the WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) placed work requirements on parents. Immediately upon enrolling in the WRP, two-parent families with an unemployed parent were enrolled in Reach Up (Vermont’s voluntary welfare-to-work program), through which they received case management and participated in job search activities. The WRP placed these clients in subsidized, minimum-wage, community service employment if they were unemployed after receiving cash assistance as described

above. The WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) intervention also provided financial incentives to work. For example, it enabled clients to earn more and have more of certain assets without losing eligibility for cash assistance. All clients were subject to these rule changes upon entry into the WRP. If clients did not comply with the work requirement, the state limited their use of the cash assistance grant by using it to pay clients’ bills and required the primary earner parent to attend three meetings at the welfare office each month. The intervention did not place a time limit on receipt of cash assistance.

Interventions with the greatest effect size

Another way to assess intervention effectiveness is to examine the greatest effects by domain. Across all work experience and work-based learning interventions:

- YAIP had the biggest effect on short-term earnings (\$1,464 per year) and short-term employment (8.2 percentage points).
- WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) had the biggest effect on long-term earnings (\$774 per year) and reduction in the proportion of people receiving short-term public benefits (-1.7 percentage points).
- WRP had the biggest effect on long-term employment (5.0 percentage points).

Needs for future research

Although this brief examines the effectiveness of work experience and work-based learning interventions, more research would help clarify the benefits of this strategy and when it improves outcomes. Few interventions examined by high- or moderate-rated studies used this strategy, and most evidence on work experience and work-based learning is from the 1990s. More timely evidence is needed to understand what drives some work experience and work-based learning interventions to be more successful than others. For example, most of these interventions enforced work requirements for people receiving public assistance, but more recent interventions provided voluntary internships and work experience for young adults. Interventions often have larger effect sizes when participation is voluntary ([Streke and Rotz 2022](#)). More evidence is needed on voluntary work-based learning experiences such as internships or trainings in work settings. In addition, few interventions examined the effect on education and training attainment. More evidence is necessary to understand the effect of work experience and work-based learning on education and training outcomes among interventions that also provide education and training services or that otherwise aim to improve these outcomes. In addition, although some interventions improved outcomes, few improved them sufficiently to be likely to move workers and families out of poverty. Further research might explore what work experience and work-based learning interventions could achieve this goal.

Endnotes

- ¹ An intervention's primary service is the principal service of the intervention. The primary service is (1) a component that a large proportion of intervention group members received and a large proportion of comparison group members did not and (2) the component was described by the study authors as most integral to the theory of change tested by the study. Interventions may provide multiple services, but only one service is designated as primary. This Evidence Snapshot includes interventions with a primary service of work experience and work-based learning.
- ² Welfare reform refers to efforts in the 1990s to reform state and federal welfare programs, notably including the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- ³ A high rating means there is strong evidence that the study findings are solely attributable to the intervention examined. A moderate rating means that readers can be somewhat confident that the study findings are attributable to the intervention, but other factors not accounted for in the study might also have contributed to the findings. Some work experience and work-based learning interventions may have been examined only in low-rated studies. These interventions were not included in this Evidence Snapshot. For more information, see the section "How does the Pathways Clearinghouse calculate the average effect of an intervention?"
- ⁴ Evaluations of work experience and work-based learning interventions that are ongoing or that released findings after May 2022 are not included in this snapshot. The Pathways Clearinghouse continues to review new studies and might produce updated snapshots as additional evidence becomes available.
- ⁵ Earnings data were reported in various timeframes, including quarterly and annually. The Pathways Clearinghouse converted all the earnings estimates to annual estimates.
- ⁶ Five interventions had studies measuring the effect on the proportion of people receiving public benefits. Studies of four interventions measured effects on the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the short term, and studies of five interventions measured effects on the proportion of people receiving public benefits in the long term. Studies of five interventions measured the amount of public benefits received in the short or long term. Studies of four interventions measured the amount of public benefits received in the short term, and studies of five interventions measured the amount of public benefits received in the long term. However, the studies of three interventions—Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare, Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP), and WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only)—did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size on the amount of public benefits received in the long term. Similarly, WRP (as compared with WRP Incentives Only) did not include enough information for us to calculate an effect size on the amount of public benefits received in the short term. Therefore, these interventions are not included in the average calculation or the amount of public benefits received graphs in this report. In contrast to considering public benefits amount and receipt separately, the Pathways Clearinghouse considered public benefit amount and receipt together and assigned them a single, combined effectiveness rating. That means the ratings listed in this report might or might not line up with summary ratings in Exhibit 1 and on the website.
- ⁷ The Pathways Clearinghouse includes measures of the attainment of educational degrees and other credentials of potential value in the labor market (for example, acquisition of a GED, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, attaining a certificate or credential). Studies may include other measures of education and training outcomes, such as decompositions of measures over time (for example, earned a GED within one year of service receipt) and measures of credit attainment, but the Pathways Clearinghouse does not include such measures in its review.

⁸ The comparison group varies by study, so in this section, we present the statistics by percentage of studies and not the percentage of interventions.

⁹ The Pathways Clearinghouse considers statistical significance to be support for the existence of an effect of an intervention. The Pathways Clearinghouse considers an effect estimate statistically significant if the p-value of a two-sided hypothesis test of whether the effect is equal to zero is less than 0.05. A p-value is the probability of observing an effect estimate as large or larger than the one observed, if there were no actual effect.

¹⁰ Three interventions—Minnesota Tier 2, Riverside Labor Force Attachment Program (as compared with Riverside Human Capital Development Program), and Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare—placed clients in unpaid work experiences. In Minnesota Tier 2, about 10 percent of clients participated in subsidized employment and 9 percent participated in unpaid work within 12 months. Less than one percent of Riverside Labor Force Attachment clients participated in unpaid work experience. About six percent of Virginia Independence Program with Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare clients participated in unpaid work experience in the first year of the intervention.

¹¹ Specific definitions of these services are available in this glossary: <https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/glossary>. Services were included if provided to the intervention group but not the comparison group, or if the services were provided more intensively or differently to the intervention group than the comparison group.

¹² We report the proportion of people receiving public benefits and the amount of public benefits received separately in these exhibits for graphing purposes. When reporting intervention effectiveness ratings for the public benefit receipt outcome domain, the Pathways Clearinghouse considers these outcomes together based on effect sizes and assigns them a single, combined effectiveness rating.

¹⁵ The Pathways Clearinghouse adjusted the various estimated effects to account for inflation and other changes over time. This adjustment accounts for changes in the maximum amount of public benefits available because of the Great Recession and other policy changes.

References

Streke, Andrei, and Dana Rotz (2022). *Synthesis report: What works to improve employment and earnings for people with low incomes?*, OPRE Report #2022-51, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Goals of the Pathways Clearinghouse

The Pathways Clearinghouse systematically evaluates and summarizes the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions that aim to improve employment outcomes, reduce employment challenges, and support self-sufficiency for populations with low incomes. It has several goals:

- Conduct a transparent, comprehensive search to identify studies of employment and training interventions designed to improve employment, increase earnings, support self-sufficiency, or advance education and training for populations who have low incomes.
- Rate the quality of those studies to assess the strength of the evidence they provide on various interventions.
- Determine the evidence of effectiveness for those interventions.
- Share the results, as well as other Clearinghouse products, on a user-friendly website to help state and local TANF administrators, policymakers, researchers, and the general public make sense of the results and better understand how this evidence might apply to questions and contexts that matter to them.
- Synthesize the overall state of evidence in the field by creating and disseminating a variety of reports, briefs, and other products.

For more information, see <https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov>.

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