Research Studies on the YouthBuild Program

Research studies conducted on YouthBuild since 1996 are listed below. Some were contracted and funded by government agencies; some by YouthBuild USA with private funds; some by other entities or individual researchers with their own funds. They are listed in reverse chronological order.


- Anne Leslie, *YouthBuild USA Youthful Offender Project, Year 1*, YouthBuild USA, 2007.


- Ronald Ferguson, Jason Snipes et al, *YouthBuild in Developmental Perspective: A Formative Evaluation of the YouthBuild Demonstration Project*. Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Public/Private Ventures, 1996.
Synopsis of Key Research on YouthBuild

COST-BENEFIT STUDIES:

Mark Cohen and Alex Piquero, Costs and Benefits of a Targeted Intervention Program for Youthful Offenders: The YouthBuild USA Offender Project (2008). This is a cost-benefit analysis of YouthBuild USA’s targeted intervention program aimed at youthful offenders using data on 388 offenders at 34 local programs. The authors found (1) evidence of reduced recidivism and improved education outcomes, and (2) a positive benefit-to-cost ratio, with every dollar spent on every youth estimated to produce a social return on investment of at least $7.80 for the education gains; and every dollar on court-involved youth estimated to produce a social return on investment between $10.80 and $42.90, with benefits to society ranging between $134,000 and $536,000 per participant at a cost to society of about $12,500 (training stipends to students are excluded from this $12,500 because they were connected to producing affordable housing.)

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Minnesota YouthBuild Program: A Measurement of Costs and Benefits to the State of Minnesota, revised 2003. This study measures the benefits of increased earnings, state taxes paid by participants on these earnings, and reduced state prison costs of participants with a prior offense. It focuses on the YouthBuild programs funded by the State of Minnesota. The study finds that each new group of youth trained in the Minnesota YouthBuild program produces approximately $350,000 per year in additional state tax revenues and $1.2 million in state prison cost savings in the first year after finishing the program. This translates into approximately $1.5 million in direct benefits in the first year after a participant cohort exits the program, compared to the state’s cost of $877,000 per year.
QUALITATIVE STUDIES:

Andrew Wiegand, Michelle S. Manno et al, Adapting to Local Context: Findings from the YouthBuild Evaluation Implementation Study Social Policy Research Associates and MDRC, February 2015. This report presents the program implementation of YouthBuild findings from a study conducted by MDRC and Social Policy Research Associates. The evaluation was launched in 2010, and uses a random assignment design to examine the impacts of YouthBuild as implemented by 75 programs operating the program nationwide. For the evaluation, eligible applicants were assigned at random either to a program group, which was eligible for YouthBuild, or to a control group, which was not eligible for YouthBuild. Both groups had access to all other services available in the community.

Ronald Ferguson, Jason Snipes, Farhana Hossein, and Michelle Manno, Developing Positive Young Adults: A Framework for Understanding Identity Development, MDRC, 2015. This report presents findings from two separate research efforts that shed light on the process of youth transformation and identity development in YouthBuild. The first paper, written in 1997 by Ronald F. Ferguson and Jason Snipes, is based on a formative evaluation of early YouthBuild programs between 1991 and 1994. In that evaluation, participants described themselves as more efficacious, optimistic, and morally upright after participating in the program for a year.

Ronald F. Ferguson et al., YouthBuild in development perspective: A formative evaluation of the YouthBuild demonstration, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996. This study, a qualitative and quantitative analysis, examined the first five demonstration sites for two full cycles. It included pre and post interviews of over 60 students. Comparison with other nationally known youth programs showed that YouthBuild had the highest level of GED achievement. The study defined the observable stages of personal development that students went through to change their identity and relationship to society. It also defined the key elements of the top performing sites correlated with high outcomes. These elements included: 1) attention and support from the sponsoring agency; 2) excellent leadership at the program level; 3) fidelity to the YouthBuild philosophy and program design; 4) sufficient flexible funding to address issues as they arose without bureaucratic obstacles; 5) control by the sponsoring organization over the construction sites and housing development; 6) excellent training and technical assistance; and 7) a cohesive, caring, and competent staff.

Anne Wright, The YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work Program: Its Outcomes and Policy Implications. YouthBuild USA, 2001. This is a study of a three-year grant funded by DOL run from 1998 to 2001 by YouthBuild USA at ten programs. The outcomes of the YouthBuild Welfare-to-Work (WtW) program were higher than those of other WtW programs recruiting under the same eligibility regulations, with 50 percent of all trainees being placed in a job at the end of the program, compared to 44 percent of other WtW program enrollees. YouthBuild graduates earned an average of $7.91 an hour in their first job placement (in 2001), compared with $6.81 an hour for other WtW program participants.

Life After YouthBuild: 900 YouthBuild Graduates Reflect on Their Lives, Dreams, and Experiences. Heller School at Brandeis University (Andrew Hahn, Thomas D. Leavitt) 2004. This study combined a 15-page survey of 900 graduates from more than 30 programs and in-depth interviews with a cross-section of 57 randomly selected graduates at 8 programs. Both the survey and the interview results showed that YouthBuild graduates are highly positive about their program experiences, appreciating both the family-like environment and the high expectations of the staff. The survey results showed that 75% of these graduates were either in postsecondary education or in jobs averaging $10/hour; 91% of graduates rated their YouthBuild experience highly; 85% were still involved in community activities; and a high percentage were successful and free of government supports using a variety of indicators. Many graduates also felt a need for more assistance with personal or career-related issues after graduation.

Evaluation of the YouthBuild Youth Offender Grants. Social Policy Research Associates, 2009. In 2004, DOL selected YouthBuild USA to participate in its Incarcerated Youth Offender Program, granting $18.2 million over three years to YouthBuild USA for 34 local YouthBuild programs enrolling over 1200 youth. Outcomes exceeded all but one of the short-term targets, including enrollment, completion, GED/HSD attainment, placement, wages, and recidivism. DOL engaged Social Policy Research Associates
(SPRA) to do a thorough qualitative study of the program in its third year. The evaluation assessed recruitment and enrollment, educational services, vocational training, case management and retention, and youth leadership and community service.

The study found that all the programs adhered to the basic YouthBuild program design and philosophy, and beyond that the higher performing programs shared certain characteristics: they were usually part of a larger sponsoring agency in which leadership treated YouthBuild as a priority, had a lower student-to-staff ratio, offered their GED preparation or high school classes onsite with teachers from similar backgrounds as the students, effectively linked vocational training to academic instruction, offered industry recognized certifications, had a youth policy council to advise the director, and offered both housing rehabilitation and new construction. It found that the intensity of partnerships with other local agencies did not correlate with higher outcomes. It was more important to have a cohesive internal program community.
The Efficacy of Education Awards in YouthBuild AmeriCorps Programs: Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, Andy Hahn and Tom Leavitt, 2007. This report looks at the degree to which AmeriCorps Education Awards affect involvement in postsecondary education-related activities, utilizing comparisons between YouthBuild AmeriCorps and other YouthBuild completers. The analysis showed that (1) program completers at YouthBuild AmeriCorps programs were more likely than completers at non-AmeriCorps YouthBuild programs to have applied to and been accepted to postsecondary education or training institutions, and to be preparing for a variety of postsecondary educational options, and (2) within the YouthBuild AmeriCorps respondent population, those who actually earned an AmeriCorps Education Award were more likely to apply to, be accepted to, and be enrolled in post-secondary institutions than those who did not earn an AmeriCorps Education Award. Effects were particularly strong among black men.

Pathways into Leadership: A Study of YouthBuild Graduates, CIRCLE, Tufts University, Peter Levine, 2012. This report studied YouthBuild students who had participated in YouthBuild USA’s pathways into civic leadership and found them to be extraordinarily effective. Young people who faced enormous challenges at entry to YouthBuild and barely expected to live to age 25 changed their trajectory, internalized the skills and values to become committed civic leaders, with many becoming non-profit professionals, pastors, and even elected officials.