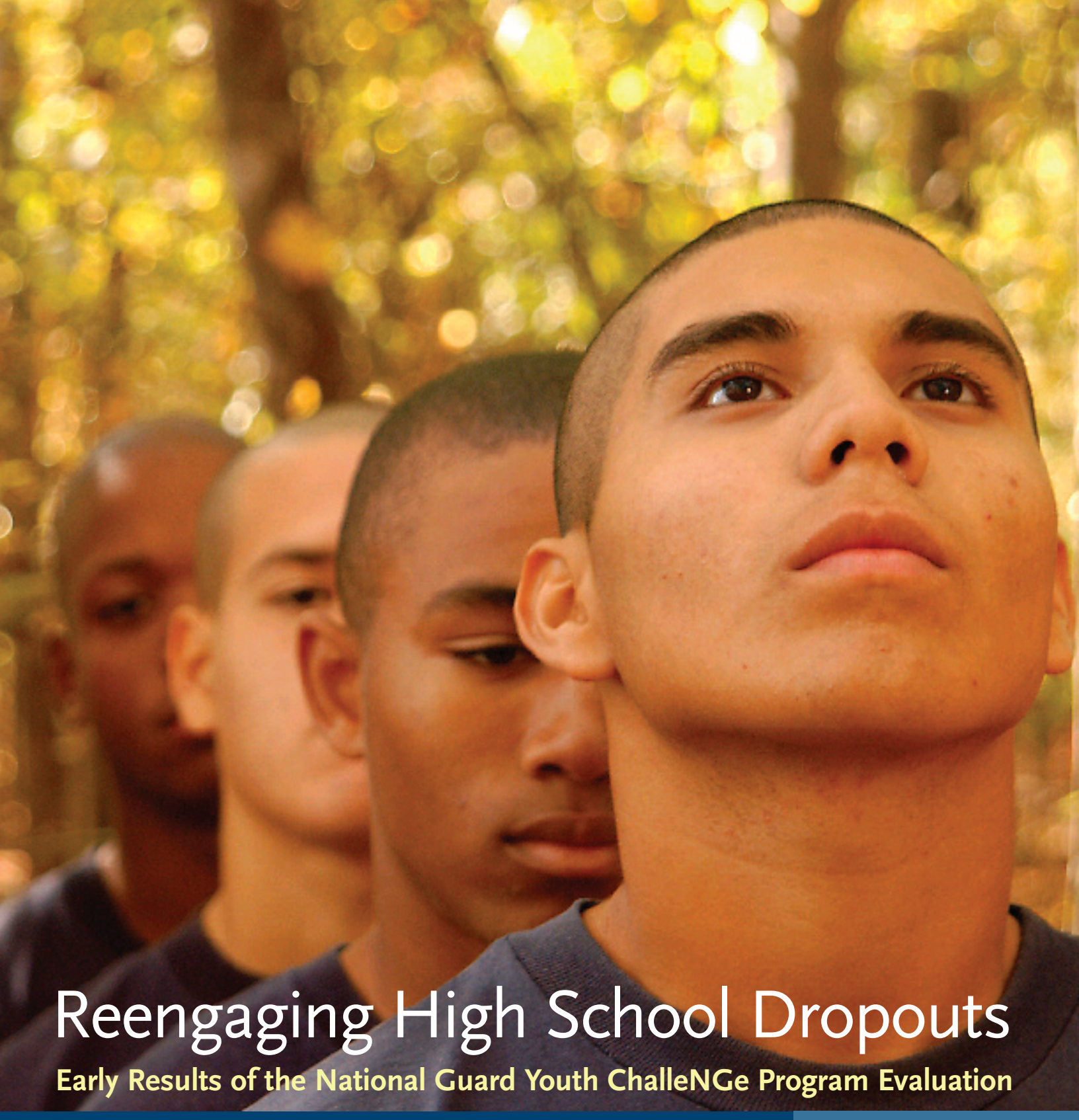

Reengaging High School Dropouts

Early Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program Evaluation

Dan Bloom
Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks
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Overview

High school dropouts face daunting odds of success in a labor market that increasingly rewards education and skills. This report presents very early results from a rigorous, independent evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, an intensive residential program that aims to "reclaim the lives" of young people ages 16 to 18 who have dropped out of school. ChalleNGe currently operates in more than half the states. About 75,000 young people have completed the program since the early 1990s. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, is conducting the evaluation, along with the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood. Private foundations and the U.S. Department of Defense are funding the evaluation.

The 17-month ChalleNGe program is divided into three phases: Pre-ChalleNGe, which is a two-week orientation and assessment period; a 20-week Residential Phase built around eight core components designed to promote positive youth development; and a one-year Postresidential Phase featuring a structured mentoring program. During the first two phases, participants in the program live at the program site, often on a military base. The environment is described as "quasi-military," though there are no requirements for military service.

The evaluation uses a random assignment research design. Because there were more qualified applicants than slots, a lottery-like process was used to decide which applicants were admitted to the program. The young people who were admitted (the program group) are being compared over time with those who were not admitted (the control group); any significant differences that emerge between the groups can be attributed to ChalleNGe. About 3,000 young people entered the study in 10 ChalleNGe programs in 2005-2006.

Early Results

About 80 percent of the program group started the program, two-thirds completed the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase, and about half graduated from the Residential Phase. A survey administered about nine months after the members of the program and control groups entered the study — not long after ChalleNGe graduates began the program's Postresidential Phase — found that:

- **The program group was much more likely than the control group to have obtained a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certificate (GED).** At the time of the survey, 46 percent of the program group had a diploma or a GED, compared with about 10 percent of the control group.

- **The program group was more likely than the control group to be working and attending college; members of the control group were more likely to have returned to high school.** For example, just over 30 percent of the program group versus 21 percent of the control group reported that they were working full time.

- **The program group reported better health and higher levels of self-efficacy and were less likely to have been arrested.**

It is too early to draw any conclusions about the long-term effects of ChalleNGe. Nevertheless, the early results suggest that partway through their ChalleNGe experience, young people in the program group are better positioned to move forward in their transition to adulthood. Results from an 18-month survey will be available in late 2009.

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Preface

Young people who drop out of high school before graduation face long odds of success in a labor market that increasingly rewards skills and postsecondary credentials. Over the past three decades, a number of rigorous studies have tested a variety of "second chance" programs targeting dropouts. While there have been some glimmers of hope, the overall story of these studies has been discouraging. Thus, there is a pressing need for reliable evidence about programs that can successfully engage dropouts and help them get back on track.

The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program is not as well known as some other, larger national youth programs, but ChalleNGe currently operates in more than half the states and has served more than 70,000 young people since the early 1990s. The program model includes an unusual mix of features that make it particularly promising: an intensive residential phase with military-style discipline, a comprehensive focus on activities thought to promote positive youth development, and a postresidential program built around mentoring.

Working with scholars from the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, ChalleNGe program directors, and staff from the U.S. Department of Defense, MDRC designed and mounted a random assignment evaluation of ChalleNGe in 10 sites. This report describes the study, the program, and the young people who participate in ChalleNGe — and presents some very early data on the program's impacts. Nine months after entering the study, members of the ChalleNGe program group were much more likely than their control group counterparts to have obtained a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certificate and were also more likely to have enrolled in college and to be employed. The program group also reported better health and less obesity.

These early results are quite promising but the story is far from over. Thanks to generous support from a number of private foundations and the Defense Department, we have been able to complete an 18-month follow-up survey of nearly 1,200 study participants, and are now embarking on a 36-month follow-up that will be completed in 2010. The results from those two surveys will provide highly reliable evidence about the effectiveness of the ChalleNGe program — and should inform future deliberations about whether to expand ChalleNGe to help more young people.

Gordon Berlin
President

Acknowledgments

The ChalleNGe evaluation has been an immensely complex undertaking, and many people have contributed to its success to date.

Officials at the U.S. Department of Defense have provided ongoing support and assistance since the study's planning phase. In the Office of the Secretary of Defense, we wish to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Jennifer Buck and Ernie Gonzales. In the National Guard Bureau, thanks go to James Tinkham and Joe Padilla.

Space does not permit us to list all of the state-level ChalleNGe program staff who have contributed to the study, but it would have been impossible without their dedication. We are especially indebted to the 12 program directors who made the difficult decision to open their programs to rigorous scrutiny in order to build knowledge about the program's effectiveness. Special thanks go to the following current and former directors and staff: in Arizona, Charles McCarty and Tom Fox; in California, Nancy Baird and Suzy Elwell; in Florida, Danny Brabham, James Ransom, and Tammy Russell; in Georgia, Frank Williams and Janet Zimmerman; in Illinois, Peter Thomas, Terry Downen, and Hattie Lenoir-Price; in Michigan, Roger Allen, James Luce, and Ben Wallace; in Mississippi, William Crowson and Kirri Martin; in New Mexico, Arthur Longoria and Terry Luginbill; in North Carolina, Edward Toler, Dale Autry, and Billy King; in Texas, Peggy Baldwin, Mike Weir, and Grayling Alexander; in Virginia, Thomas Early and Delphoney Nash; in Wisconsin, Michael MacLaren and Michael Brown. Additional thanks go to Roger Allen, Michael MacLaren, and Janet Zimmerman for reviewing a draft of the report.

Pat Antosh of AOC Solutions provided very useful guidance on the use of data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System. Louise Hanson of Westat, Inc., has ably directed the surveys. Members of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, led by Frank Furstenberg, have been partners in the study from its inception.

At MDRC, Gordon Berlin, Fred Doolittle, and Robert Ivry developed the study, and Tom Brock led its early stages. John Martinez, Vanessa Martin, Donna Wharton-Fields, and David Butler served as liaisons to the programs. Joel Gordon and Galina Farberova designed the random assignment system. Colleen Sommo served as data manager, and Asa Wilks, Megan Millenky, and Ihno Lee programmed the analysis. Brandon Early and Sara Muller-Ravett played key roles early on, Jo Anna Hunter led the competition to select the survey firm, and Beni Price served as the primary liaison to Westat. Shirley James and her staff processed thousands of baseline forms. Nick Gerry-Bullard and Joseph Broadus provided coordination and fact-checking assistance. Gordon Berlin, David Butler, Fred Doolittle, and John Hutchins reviewed drafts of the report. Margaret Bald edited the report, and Stephanie Cowell prepared it for publication.

Finally, thanks to all of the young people who contributed to the study by answering surveys and speaking with the research team during site visits.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Although high school graduation and college attendance rates have increased over time in the United States, large numbers of young people do not move smoothly through the educational pipeline. Nationally, about one-fourth of high school freshmen do not graduate in four years; in the 50 largest U.S. cities, the dropout rate may be closer to 50 percent. Although most of the young people who drop out eventually graduate or, more often, earn a General Educational Development certificate (GED), a long delay may place them at a serious disadvantage in competing for jobs and obtaining postsecondary education. Moreover, a significant number of young people become profoundly "disconnected" from both school and work.

These figures are of particular concern because there is an increasingly tight link between education and earnings; postsecondary education has become a virtual prerequisite for admission to the middle class. In addition, young people who drop out of school are three and a half times more likely to be arrested.

This report presents very early results from a rigorous, independent evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, an intensive residential program that aims to "reclaim the lives" of young people, ages 16 to 18, who have dropped out of high school. ChalleNGe currently operates in more than half the states; about 75,000 young people have completed the program since it was launched in the early 1990s. The evaluation is being conducted by MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood. Several private foundations and the U.S. Department of Defense are funding the evaluation.[1]

The ChalleNGe Program

The ChalleNGe model grew out of a project by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s that sought to develop new approaches for out-of-school youth. The project's final report concluded that aspects of the military structure could be beneficial for disadvantaged youth. The report also concluded that the National Guard, with its strong community service mission, was ideally suited to operate a program for young people. The program model was developed by staff in the National Guard Bureau in the U.S. Department of Defense. In 1993, Congress funded a 10-site pilot of the ChalleNGe concept. Funding was made permanent in 1998, and today there are ChalleNGe programs in more than half the states.

[1]The study is funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The MCJ Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

States operate ChalleNGe programs under a Master Cooperative Agreement with the National Guard Bureau. Most states serve 200 to 400 young people per year in two class cycles. The funding level for ChalleNGe — about $14,000 per participant — has not changed since the early 1990s. The federal government pays 60 percent of the cost of the state programs, and states pay the remaining 40 percent.

Although there is considerable room to tailor the program model to local conditions, the basic structure of the ChalleNGe program is the same in all states. The program is open to youths between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of (or been expelled from) school, are unemployed, drug-free, and not heavily involved with the justice system. The program is open to both males and females, though about 80 percent of the participants are male. There are no income-based eligibility criteria.

The 17-month program is divided into three phases: the two-week Pre-ChalleNGe Phase, which is a demanding orientation and assessment period; a 20-week Residential Phase; and a one-year Postresidential Phase. During the first two phases (totaling 22 weeks), the participants live at the program site, often on a military base.

The curriculum for the Residential Phase is structured around eight core components that reflect current thinking about how to promote positive youth development: Leadership/Followership, Responsible Citizenship, Service to Community, Life-Coping Skills, Physical Fitness, Health and Hygiene, Job Skills, and Academic Excellence. Toward the end of the Residential Phase, the program's participants work with staff to arrange a postresidential "placement." Acceptable placements include employment, education, and military service.

The program environment is described as "quasi-military": The participants are called cadets, they are divided into platoons and squads, live in barracks, have their hair cut short, wear uniforms, and are subject to military-style discipline. While the program uses military structure, discipline, facilities, and staff to accomplish its objectives, participation in ChalleNGe is voluntary, and there are no requirements for military service during the program or afterward.

The cadets who successfully complete the Residential Phase move into the one-year Postresidential Phase, which involves a structured mentoring program. This Postresidential Phase distinguishes ChalleNGe from most residential programs for youth. Its purpose is to help young people with the difficult task of maintaining the new attitudes and behaviors they learn in the Residential Phase when they return to their communities, families, and friends.

The ChalleNGe Evaluation

The National Guard Bureau collects extensive data on program participation and on outcomes for the young people who have gone through the program. However, for some time,

officials and program directors have been eager to obtain more rigorous data on what difference the program makes. Thus, in 2004, they began working with MDRC and the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood to explore the possibility of conducting a rigorous evaluation of the program. In 2005, 12 state ChalleNGe programs agreed to participate in the evaluation.

The ChalleNGe evaluation uses a random assignment research design in which a group of young people who applied to ChalleNGe and were invited to participate (the ChalleNGe group or program group) are being compared over time with a second group of young people who applied to ChalleNGe and were deemed acceptable, but were not invited to participate because there were too few slots available (the control group). Because the study's participants were assigned to one group or the other through a random process, one can be confident that any significant differences that emerge between the groups over time — for example, differences in educational attainment or employment rates — can be attributed to ChalleNGe. These differences are described as *impacts*.

Random assignment was conducted for 18 class cycles across 10 programs[2] (two of the programs that agreed to participate were unable to conduct random assignment because they had too few applicants). About 3,000 young people entered the study in 2005-2006.

About 1,000 study participants in both groups completed a brief survey about nine months after they entered the study (the survey did not target all study participants; the response rate among those targeted was 85 percent). A more extensive survey is being administered to about 1,200 study participants in both groups, about 18 months after they entered the study. A third survey, at 36 months, is planned. Eventually, the study may obtain administrative records to measure employment, college attendance, military enlistment, and other outcomes.

Early Results

Most of the study's participants were 17 years old when they entered the study, and more than 80 percent are male. Roughly equal proportions described themselves as white (41 percent) or African-American/black (40 percent); most of the rest described themselves as Hispanic. Almost all are U.S. citizens, and only about 3 percent reported having any children.

Only 23 percent of the sample members lived with both biological parents when they entered the study; another 21 percent lived with a parent and a stepparent. More than 40 percent lived in a single-parent household (most commonly with their mother). Fewer than one-third of

[2]The programs that participated in the evaluation were in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, Texas, and Wisconsin.

sample members reported that their household received any public assistance, indicating that the ChalleNGe population is not, in general, extremely low income. About half the sample members reported that their grades were mostly Ds and Fs, and more than 80 percent reported that they had been suspended from school at least once. Nearly one-third reported that they had an Individual Education Plan, which indicates special education status.

Field research visits to all 10 of the programs in the study revealed significant variation across sites in the environment of the program, approaches to recruitment and discipline, and other elements. In interviews, staff reported a number of implementation challenges. For example, many programs were coping with funding shortages and the absence of experienced staff who were National Guard members and had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Nevertheless, all the programs were implementing the core elements of ChalleNGe, and their staff were generally highly committed and professional.

Data from the program's national management information system show that about 80 percent of the young people who were assigned to the study's program group actually started the program; others may have changed their mind about participating after they were invited or showed up to the program, or they may have failed a drug screen. About two-thirds of the program group completed the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase and formally enrolled, and about half graduated from the Residential Phase. The graduation rate *among enrollees* was about 78 percent, close to the national average.

The survey, which was administered about nine months after the members of the program and control groups entered the study — not long after ChalleNGe graduates began the program's Postresidential Phase — found that:

- **The program group was much more likely than the control group to have earned a high school diploma or a GED.**

Table ES.1 shows some of the results from the nine-month survey. The top panel shows that about 10 percent of the control group had earned a diploma or (more commonly) a GED since they entered the study. In contrast, almost half (46 percent) of the program group had earned a diploma or a GED. This very large difference — more than 35 percentage points — is statistically significant, meaning that ChalleNGe almost certainly increased the receipt of diplomas/GEDs (that is, the difference between groups is very unlikely to be a statistical fluke). It is interesting that ChalleNGe increased the receipt of both diplomas and GEDs; this likely reflects the fact that some ChalleNGe programs are accredited high schools or can offer high school diplomas to graduates of the program, while others target the GED.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table ES.1

Early Impacts on Selected Outcomes

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Educational attainment			
Earned high school diploma or GED	45.6	10.1	35.5 ***
High school diploma	14.6	2.6	12.0 ***
GED	30.9	7.5	23.4 ***
Current status			
Currently in			
High school	16.3	35.5	-19.2 ***
GED prep	14.8	20.9	-6.1 **
College courses	10.9	2.7	8.2 ***
Job training	14.0	10.1	3.9 *
Currently working	51.2	42.1	9.1 ***
Currently working full time[a]	30.5	20.9	9.6 ***
Currently working or in any of the above activities	74.4	76.3	-1.9
Criminal justice			
Arrested since random assignment	14.2	20.0	-5.8 **
Convicted since random assignment	6.5	11.0	-4.4 **
In jail, prison, or detention center since random assignment	10.7	18.9	-8.2 ***
Health			
Self-rating of overall health very good or excellent	76.7	68.3	8.4 ***
Body mass index (BMI)[b]	24.2	24.3	-0.1
Overweight[c]	25.3	21.1	4.2
Obese[c]	8.4	12.8	-4.3 **
Self-efficacy and social adjustment scale[d]			
High	11.0	7.0	4.0 **
Low	10.7	20.3	-9.6 ***
Sample size (total = 1,018)	648	370	

(continued)

Table ES.1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the nine-month survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, and * = 10 percent.

All numbers have been weighted to account for varying random assignment ratios and sample sizes by site. In general, sites with larger sample sizes are weighted more heavily.

[a]Full-time employment is defined as working 30+ hours per week.

[b]Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared.

[c]Overweight is defined as a BMI between 25 and 29; obesity is defined as BMI of 30 or more.

[d]Scale is created from seven survey questions regarding self-efficacy and social adjustment, as rated on a four-point scale. High/low designations represent one standard deviation above or below the mean.

- **The program group was more likely than the control group to be working and also more likely to be attending college; control group members were more likely to have returned to high school.**

The second panel of Table ES.1 shows sample members' current activities. It is notable that more than one-third of the control group reported that they were currently enrolled in high school. Perhaps some of these control group members were not fully disengaged from high school when they applied for ChalleNGe and chose (or were persuaded by their parents) to return to school when they were not accepted to the program. There is no way to know how many of these young people will complete high school, since many are far behind academically. This will be an important story to follow over time.

While the control group was more likely to have returned to high school, the program group was more likely to be in college or in training and also more likely to be working. For example, 11 percent of the program group reported that they were taking college courses at the time of the survey, compared with 3 percent of the control group. Just over 30 percent of the program group versus 21 percent of the control group reported that they were working full time.

- **The program group reported better health and higher levels of self-efficacy and were less likely to have been arrested.**

The third panel of Table ES.1 shows that members of the program group were less likely to have been arrested or convicted or to have spent time "locked up" since the time they entered the study. This is not surprising, since many of them had been living at a ChalleNGe program site for much of the nine-month follow-up period. Members of the program group also reported better health and less obesity.

Finally, several questions on the survey were combined into a measure of self-efficacy — a person's belief about his or her capacity to deal with life's challenges. The responses of the program group were more likely to signal high self-efficacy and much less likely to indicate low self-efficacy (most responses were in the middle of the scale, somewhere between "high" and "low").

*****

It is far too early to draw any conclusions about the long-term effects of ChalleNGe. Other programs for dropouts have increased GED attainment without producing long-term increases in earnings or other outcomes. Nevertheless, the early results suggest that partway through their ChalleNGe experience, young people in the program group are better positioned to move forward in their transition to adulthood. Results from the 18-month survey will be available in late 2009.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Although high school graduation and college attendance rates have increased over time in the United States, large numbers of young people do not move smoothly through the educational pipeline. Nationally, about one-fourth of high school freshmen do not graduate in four years; in the 50 largest U.S. cities, the dropout rate may be closer to 50 percent.[1] Although most of those who drop out eventually graduate or, more often, earn a General Educational Development certificate (GED), a long delay may place them at a serious disadvantage in competing for jobs and obtaining postsecondary education.[2] Moreover, a significant number of young people become profoundly "disconnected" from both school and work. Nationally, about 14 percent of 18- and 19-year-olds have not graduated from high school, are not attending school, and are not working. The comparable figure is 23 percent for African-American 18- and 19-year-olds.[3]

These figures are of particular concern because there is an increasingly tight link between education and earnings; postsecondary education has become a virtual prerequisite for admission to the middle class. As shown in Figure 1.1, earnings rise sharply with educational attainment.[4]

Beyond (or perhaps, because of) their limited earnings potential, young men who do not complete high school are quite likely to become involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, further damaging their long-term prospects. One study found that young people who drop out of high school are two and a half times more likely to be arrested.[5]

This report presents very early results from an ongoing evaluation of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, which is designed to "reclaim the lives of at-risk youth" who have dropped out of high school and give them the skills and values to succeed as adults.[6] ChalleNGe is an intensive residential program that currently operates in more than half the states. About

[1]Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, and Chapman (2007). However, Roy and Mishel (2008) argue that graduation rates may be somewhat higher than reported in many recent studies.

[2]One national study tracked students who were in the eighth grade in 1988. About 20 percent of the students dropped out of high school at least once. Among the dropouts, 63 percent earned a high school diploma (19 percent) or a GED (44 percent) by 2000, eight years after their scheduled graduation date (Hurst, Kelly, and Princiotta, 2004).

[3]Dervarics (2004).

[4]U.S. Census Bureau (2007).

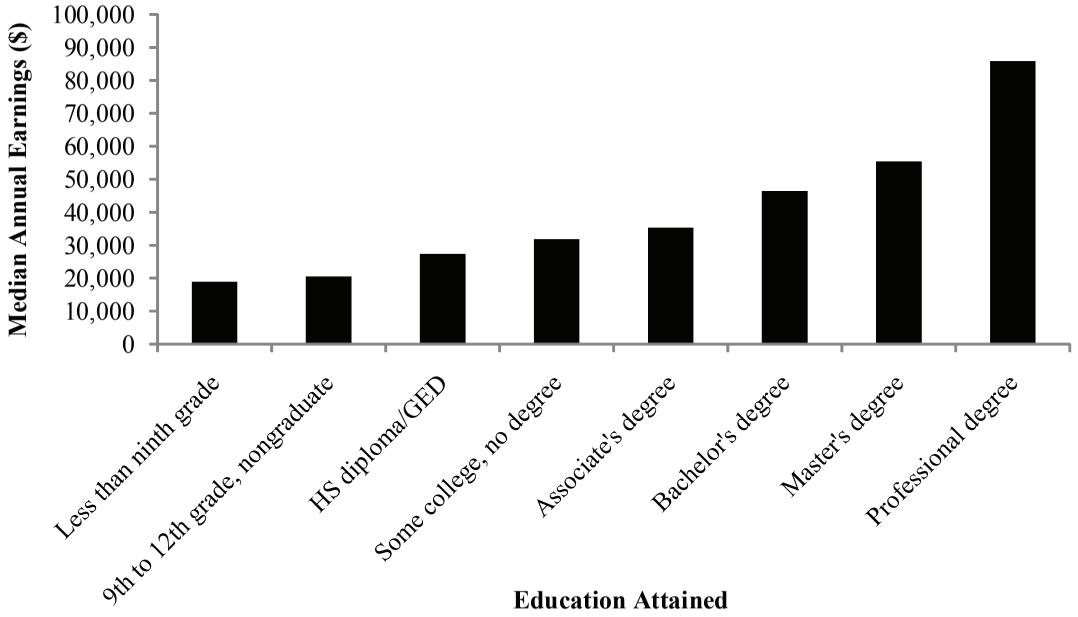
[5]Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2001).

[6]Adapted from the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program's mission statement.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Figure 1.1

Annual Earnings by Education Level
Among Individuals Age 25 and Over Who Worked Full Time in 2007



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (2007).

NOTES: Data are 2007 annual averages for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.

75,000 young people have completed the program since it was launched in the early 1990s. MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, is conducting the evaluation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood. Several private foundations and the U.S. Department of Defense are funding the evaluation.[7]

Earlier Evaluations of Youth Programs and the Origins of ChalleNGe

During the past three decades, a number of rigorous evaluations have assessed programs targeting disadvantaged youth. Some studies tested programs that primarily served youth who were at risk but were still in the regular K-12 education system, while others studied special "second-chance" programs for out-of-school youth, typically high school dropouts.

The overall record from the studies of programs for out-of-school youth has been discouraging. An evaluation of training programs for out-of-school youth operated under the Job Training Partnership Act in the 1980s found that they had no impact on earnings or even had a negative impact.[8] The participants in JOBSTART and New Chance, two intensive community-based education and training models that were tested at multiple sites in the 1980s and 1990s, were more likely to obtain a GED than their counterparts in a control group, but this did not translate into greater success in the labor market.[9] One site in the JOBSTART demonstration, the Center for Employment Training (CET) in San José, California, produced positive results, but results from a multisite replication of CET were disappointing.[10] Even the intensive, residential Job Corps program, the nation's largest program for out-of-school youth, produced no long-term increases in employment or earnings for its participants (though it did increase receipt of both GEDs and vocational certificates).[11] One of the few bright spots came from an evaluation of Conservation and Youth Service Corps, which found a variety of modest but positive impacts on employment and education outcomes, particularly for African-American males, over a relatively short follow-up period.[12]

The mostly disappointing research results from many of the 1980s studies helped trigger a broad rethinking of youth programming. Experts argued that programs should not just

[7]The study is funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The MCJ Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

[8]Orr et al. (1997).

[9]Cave, Bos, Doolittle, and Toussaint (1993); Quint, Bos, and Polit (1997).

[10]Miller et al. (2005).

[11]Schochet, McConnell, and Burghardt (2003); Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell (2006).

[12]Jastrzab, Masker, Blomquist, and Orr (1996).

address problems or "deficits," but rather should promote "positive youth development." Karen Pittman, one of the early proponents of the youth development approach, wrote:

> No matter how early we commit to addressing them, there is something fundamentally limiting about having everyone defined by a problem. In the final analysis, we do not assess people in terms of problems (or lack thereof) but potential.[13]

Proponents of this view recommended that programs should go beyond education and training to expose young people to activities, settings, and relationships that are thought to promote healthy development. ChalleNGe, along with programs such as YouthBuild,[14] are part of this movement.

The ChalleNGe model grew out of a project by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the late 1980s and early 1990s that sought to develop new approaches for out-of-school youth. The project's final report concluded that aspects of the military structure could be beneficial for disadvantaged youth.[15] Many others have made this argument, most recently in a report by the Brookings Institution, which concluded that "the United States military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach, and develop young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities."[16]

The CSIS report also concluded that the National Guard, with its strong community service mission, was ideally suited to operate a program for young people. The National Guard traces its roots back nearly 400 years to militias formed in the earliest English colonies in North America. The Guard remains a state/federal force today, operating under the command of each governor, unless units are called to active duty, in which case they fall under the authority of the appropriate service secretary (for example, the Secretary of the Army). Because of its community-based, citizen-soldier makeup, the National Guard also supports local communities with various projects and activities, including disaster preparedness and relief, funeral honors, speaking engagements, and community outreach.

Staff in the National Guard Bureau in the U.S. Department of Defense developed the program model for ChalleNGe. They had concluded that many existing programs for disadvantaged youth were "focused on the symptomatic behaviors without understanding and addressing

[13]Pittman, Irby, and Ferber (2003).

[14]YouthBuild programs serve youth ages 16 to 24. Participants work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning skills by building affordable housing. For more information, see www.youthbuild.org.

[15]Cullinan, Eaves, McCurdy, and McCain (1992).

[16]Price (2007).

the underlying causes" and "placed limited, if any, focus on the post-program phase." Thus, they designed ChalleNGe to be:

> …an intervention, rather than a remedial program. We would deal with the symptoms and underlying causes in a construct that fully embraced a "whole person" change and readied the students for the post-program environment. We would arm them with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed and we would ensure there was "a way back" to mainstream society.[17]

In 1993, Congress funded a 10-site pilot of ChalleNGe. Funding was made permanent in 1998, and today there are ChalleNGe programs in 27 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The ChalleNGe Model

States operate ChalleNGe programs under a Master Cooperative Agreement with the National Guard Bureau. Most states operate a single "100-bed" ChalleNGe program, serving a total of about 200 participants per year in two class cycles (starting in January and July). A few states operate multiple programs or larger programs. For example, among the states participating in the study, Georgia operates two 200-bed programs, Illinois operates a single 400-bed program, and Mississippi operates a single 200-bed program.

The funding level for ChalleNGe — about $14,000 per participant — has not changed since the early 1990s (in real terms, per-participant funding has fallen by about a third during that time). Thus, the typical 100-bed program has an annual budget of about $3 million. Since 1998, the federal government has paid 60 percent of the cost of the state programs, and states have paid the remaining 40 percent.

Programs typically assemble the state share of the funding from several different state and local sources. In some cases, a local school district supplies teachers. In some programs, small nonprofit organizations raise modest sums to support extra program activities, such as a graduation stipend, team uniforms, a graduation dinner dance, and a yearbook. In interviews, many program directors reported that state budget cuts in recent years had forced them to reduce enrollment targets, require staff to work uncompensated overtime, cut back on staff training, and eliminate program extras that could not be recovered from nonprofit or parent organizations.

Although there is considerable room to tailor the program model to local conditions, the basic structure of the ChalleNGe program is the same in all states. The program is open to

[17] Donohue (2008).

young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of (or been expelled from) school, are unemployed, drug-free, and not heavily involved with the justice system.[18] The program is open to both males and females, though about 80 percent of the participants are male. There are no income-based eligibility criteria.

As shown in Figure 1.2, the 17-month program is divided into three phases: the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase (two weeks), the Residential Phase (20 weeks), and the Postresidential Phase (one year). During the first two phases (totaling 22 weeks), the participants live at the program site, often on a military base.

The first phase, Pre-ChalleNGe, is a physically and psychologically demanding assessment and orientation period. Candidates are introduced to the program's rules and expectations; learn military bearing, discipline, and teamwork; and begin physical fitness training.

Candidates who complete Pre-ChalleNGe are formally enrolled in the program as "cadets" and move to the second phase. The curriculum for the 20-week Residential Phase is structured around eight core components that reflect current thinking about how to promote positive youth development: Leadership/Followership, Responsible Citizenship, Service to Community, Life-Coping Skills, Physical Fitness, Health and Hygiene, Job Skills, and Academic Excellence. Each of these components is described in Chapter 3. Toward the end of the Residential Phase, the cadets work with staff to arrange a postresidential "placement." Acceptable placements include employment, education, and military service.

The structure of the residential part of the program is designed to minimize some of the potentially negative effects of placing many at-risk young people together in a program setting — sometimes referred to as "deviant peer influences" or "peer contagion."[19] The program environment is described as "quasi-military": The cadets are divided into platoons and squads, live in barracks, have their hair cut short, wear uniforms, and are subject to military-style discipline. The daily schedule is highly structured with almost no "down time," and the cadets are closely supervised by staff at all times. While ChalleNGe uses military structure, discipline,

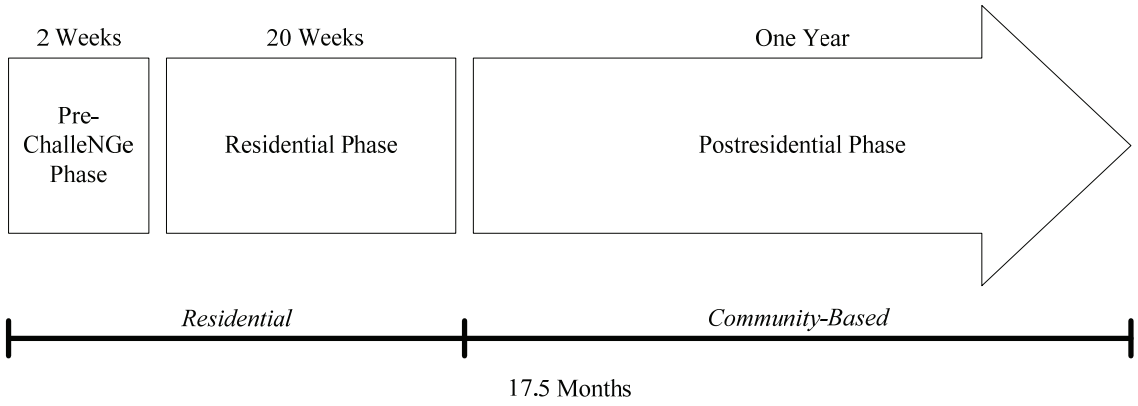
[18]More specifically, in order to be eligible for ChalleNGe, candidates must be 16 to 18 years of age and enter the program before their nineteenth birthday; a high school dropout/expellee; a citizen or legal resident of the United States and a resident of the state in which the program is conducted; unemployed; not currently on parole or on probation for anything other than juvenile status offenses, not serving time or awaiting sentencing, not under indictment or charged and not convicted of a felony or a capital offense; and drug-free.

[19]Dodge, Dishion, and Lansford (2007).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Figure 1.2

ChalleNGe Program Phases



facilities, and staff to accomplish its objectives, participation in the program is voluntary, and there are no requirements for military service during the program or afterward.

The cadets who successfully complete the Residential Phase move into the one-year Postresidential Phase, which involves a structured mentoring program. The ChalleNGe mentoring program is unusual, in that young people nominate their own mentors during the application process. ChalleNGe initiates the mentoring relationship partway through the Residential Phase, after the staff screen and train the mentors. The staff then maintain contact with both the program's graduates and their mentors at least monthly during the Postresidential Phase to help solve problems and to report on the youths' progress.

As noted earlier, the structured Postresidential Phase distinguishes ChalleNGe from most residential programs for youth. The purpose of this phase is to help ChalleNGe participants with the difficult task of maintaining the new attitudes and behaviors they have learned in the Residential Phase when they return to their communities, families, and friends. Mentoring is a promising, low-cost strategy for providing guidance and support for young people. A rigorous evaluation of the nation's largest mentoring program, Big Brothers Big Sisters, found that the

program generated a variety of positive effects, though it targeted younger participants, most of whom were still in school.[20]

The ChalleNGe Evaluation

The National Guard Bureau collects fairly extensive data on program participation and participants' outcomes. These data are used for program management and to inform an annual report to Congress. However, for some time, officials in the Department of Defense and many ChalleNGe program directors have been eager to obtain more rigorous data on what difference the program makes. Outcome data do not address this question because there is no way to know to what extent the outcomes that program participants or graduates achieve are actually attributable to their participation in ChalleNGe; the program serves relatively motivated young people who might make progress on their own, without ChalleNGe. Thus, in 2004, the officials and directors began working with MDRC and the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood to explore the possibility of conducting a random assignment evaluation of the program. Ultimately, the Department of Defense agreed to fund 20 percent of the evaluation, and MDRC raised the remaining 80 percent from private foundations.

Participating Programs

In 2005, 12 state ChalleNGe programs (almost half the programs in existence at the time) agreed to participate in the evaluation. These programs were not chosen randomly. Rather, there was an effort to identify programs that had stable staffing and that tended to receive more applicants than they could serve, a prerequisite for conducting a random assignment evaluation. Table 1.1 shows some basic information about each of the 12 programs that agreed to participate. In most states, the annual graduation goal for 2005 (the year the study began) was split across two class cycles.

Research Design

The ChalleNGe evaluation uses a random assignment research design in which a group of young people who applied to ChalleNGe and were invited to participate (the program group) is being compared over time with a second group (the control group) who applied to ChalleNGe and were deemed acceptable, but were not invited to participate.

[20]Tierney and Grossman (2000).

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 1.1

Information on Participating Programs

State	Location	First Year of Operation	Annual Graduation Target (2005)
Arizona	Queen Creek	1993	224
California	Camp San Luis Obispo	1998	212
Florida	Camp Blanding	2001	220
Georgia	Fort Gordon	2000	200
Illinois	Rantoul	1993	675
Michigan	Battle Creek	1999	200
Mississippi	Camp Shelby	1994	400
New Mexico	Roswell	2001	200
North Carolina	Salemburg	1994	200
Texas	Galveston	1999	200
Virginia	Camp Pendleton	1994	200
Wisconsin	Fort McCoy	1998	200

SOURCE: National Guard Bureau (2005).

Although random assignment is generally considered the most reliable way to assess the effectiveness of social programs, the design can cause ethical concerns if the creation of a control group reduces the number of people who receive program services. Thus, for the ChalleNGe evaluation, MDRC worked with the Department of Defense and the participating programs to develop a random assignment process that aimed to ensure that the evaluation would not reduce the number of young people who received ChalleNGe's services. MDRC's Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the design.

Under this design, the participating ChalleNGe programs recruited and screened applicants more or less as usual and identified a pool of applicants who met all eligibility criteria and were considered acceptable.[21] Random assignment was conducted for a particular class cycle only if the number of acceptable applicants in the pool was at least 25 greater than the number of available program slots.[22] In other words, the programs would have had to turn away some applicants for these class cycles even without the evaluation. To facilitate the

[21]The Department of Defense authorized a modest amount of funding to support enhanced recruitment efforts by the programs that participated in the evaluation.

[22]Although the programs often refer to the number of available "beds," in fact, the number of available slots is often determined not by physical space but by funding for staff. Typically, the programs are funded and staffed to graduate a certain number of participants per cycle (100 in most programs). During the study period, program managers told MDRC how many applicants they needed to accept in order to meet the graduation target, assuming normal patterns of attrition. Random assignment was conducted if the number of qualified applicants was at least 25 greater than the number needed to meet the graduation goal.

evaluation, states agreed to use a random process to decide which qualified applicants to accept (at least one state already used a random process but most did not). Also, to preserve the integrity of the design, applicants who were assigned to the control group were not allowed to reapply for later class cycles.

The original plan was to conduct random assignment for two class cycles per program and to obtain a sample size of about 2,500 youths (1,250 per group). As shown in Table 1.2, however, there were many class cycles in which the number of applicants was too small to allow random assignment to take place. For example, in the first class cycle of 2006, only six of the 12 participating programs were able to conduct random assignment.[23] This occurred primarily because many programs tended to recruit only enough applicants to fill the available program slots.

Ultimately, random assignment was conducted for 18 class cycles across 10 programs. One program (Michigan) conducted random assignment three times, six programs conducted random assignment twice, and three programs conducted random assignment once. Two of the sites that agreed to participate (Arizona and Virginia) were unable to conduct random assignment. The total sample size (3,074) exceeded the original goal but was more heavily weighted toward the program group than originally intended (the sample includes 754 in the control group and 2,320 in the program group).[24] As discussed further in Chapter 4, this does not compromise the validity of the design.

Data Sources

The evaluation draws data from several sources:

- **Baseline questionnaire**. Just before they entered the study, the applicants completed a two-page questionnaire that was inserted into the ChalleNGe application packet in the study sites.[25] These data provide a snapshot of the study participants just before they were randomly assigned to the ChalleNGe program or to the control group.

[23]Only the Michigan program attempted to conduct random assignment in 2005. For the first cycle of 2007, only states that had previously conducted random assignment one time attempted to conduct it again. The six programs that had already conducted random assignment more than once were excluded, as were the two programs that had been unable to conduct random assignment.

[24]Sample sizes in the individual sites are relatively small, so most of the analysis will pool results from all the sites. Technically, the pooled results do not represent the overall impact of ChalleNGe nationally because the study sites were not chosen randomly.

[25]The applicants also signed a consent form to participate in the study at this point. If they were under age 18, a parent or guardian also signed the form.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 1.2

Use of Random Assignment Across ChalleNGe Sites by Program, Year, and Class Cycle

	2005	2006		2007
Program	Cycle 2	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 1
AZ		O	O	
CA		O	X	O
FL		X	X	
GA		X	X	
IL		X	X	
MI	X	X	X	
MS		O	X	X
NC		X	X	
NM		O	X	O
TX		X	X	
VA		O	O	
WI		O	X	O

SOURCE: MDRC random assignment database.

NOTES: "X" indicates that random assignment was conducted. "O" indicates that random assignment was attempted but not conducted because the number of applicants was too small.

- **Program participation data**. MDRC obtained information from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS), the national Web-based program tracking system used by all ChalleNGe programs.

- **Follow-up surveys**. MDRC conducted a competition and selected Westat, Inc., to administer follow-up surveys for the study. Westat administered the first survey, a short questionnaire, by phone or in person an average of nine months after members of the program and control groups had entered the study, shortly after members of the program group had completed the ChalleNGe Residential Phase (they administered the survey to both groups). A total of 1,018 interviews were completed, and the response rate was 85 per-

cent.[26] The primary purpose of the survey was to obtain an early reading on whether the study was going as planned; results are presented in Chapter 4. A more extensive survey is being administered approximately 18 months after participants entered the study; approximately 1,200 interviews are expected, and results will be available in late 2009. There may be a third survey wave at 36 months.

- **Site visits**. Members of the evaluation team conducted two-day visits to each of the 10 programs that conducted random assignment. Each visit included structured interviews with both program staff and participants.

Roadmap of the Report

The remainder of the report is divided into three chapters:

- Chapter 2 describes the young people who are participating in the study and the ChalleNGe staff.
- Chapter 3, based largely on visits to the programs, describes how ChalleNGe operates in the participating sites. Sections focus on how participants are recruited and enrolled, the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase, the Residential Phase and the eight core components, and the Postresidential Phase and the mentoring program.
- Chapter 4 uses data from the ChalleNGe management information system to describe the extent to which program group members participated in ChalleNGe, and also draws from the nine-month survey to present some very early evidence about the program's effects on education, employment, and health outcomes.

[26]Young people from all 10 sites participated in the early survey, but MDRC did not attempt to interview the entire research sample for that wave. Instead, the survey targeted study participants from the first random assignment cohort for each site (except Michigan, where the first two cohorts were included). The survey sample included the entire control group from each targeted cohort, plus a subset of the program group.

Chapter 2

The People: Participants in the Study and ChalleNGe Staff

This chapter describes the young people who are participating in the ChalleNGe evaluation and the staff who administer the programs. The first section gives a broad overview of the characteristics of the study's participants and discusses some key ways in which they differ from program to program. The second section draws from in-depth interviews with a small group of ChalleNGe cadets to discuss why they decided to enroll in the program. The final section describes the staffing in a typical program.

Characteristics of Participants in the Study

Table 2.1 presents selected information from the two-page survey that all sample members completed when they applied for ChalleNGe. These data provide a "snapshot" of the applicants as they entered the study. More complete data are presented in Appendix Table A.1. In general, the data indicate that ChalleNGe is serving a diverse group of high school dropouts.

Although ChalleNGe serves young people from 16 to 18 years old, the youngest applicants — those under age 16 and a half — were excluded from the evaluation; in other words, they were not subject to random assignment.[1] As noted in Chapter 1, those who were assigned to the study's control group were not permitted to reapply to ChalleNGe in later class cycles; the Department of Defense made the decision to exclude the youngest applicants from random assignment (though not from the programs) in order to reduce the number of young people who, if they were assigned to the control group, would be barred from reapplying for ChalleNGe for several class cycles. Owing to this rule, the characteristics of the participants in the study do not necessarily match those of all the young people who participated in the programs during the cycles when random assignment occurred. In addition, as discussed further below, in some programs, the exclusion had the effect of increasing the proportion of 16-year-olds in the program during the cycles when random assignment took place.

[1]Specifically, ChalleNGe applicants were excluded from random assignment if they would have been under 17 years old on the last day of the Residential Phase of the class cycle for which they applied.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 2.1

Selected Characteristics of ChalleNGe Sample Members at the Time of Random Assignment, Full Sample

Characteristic (%)	All Sites
Gender	
Male	84.1
Female	15.9
Age in years	
16	36.8
17	52.2
18	11.0
Race/ethnicity[a]	
Hispanic	14.4
White	41.3
Black	40.1
Other	4.2
Lives with	
Both biological parents	23.3
Mother only	37.1
Father only	6.4
One parent and a stepparent	20.9
No parental figures	10.9
Other combination	1.6
Anyone in household receives public assistance	29.5
Highest grade completed	
8th grade or lower	14.2
9th grade	31.4
10th grade	38.2
11th grade	15.6
12th grade	0.6
Usual grades received in school	
Mostly As and Bs	4.0
Mostly Bs and Cs	17.2
Mostly Cs and Ds	39.5
Mostly Ds and Fs	48.7
Has/had Individual Education Plan (IEP)	30.4
Ever suspended from school	82.3
Ever arrested	31.1
Ever convicted	16.3
Sample size	3,074

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Characteristic (%)	All Sites
Who first suggested you should apply for ChalleNGe? (%)	
Yourself	28.0
A relative	47.9
A school official	13.7
The justice system	6.3
Reasons for applying to ChalleNGe?	
Want a HS diploma/GED	81.3
Want to go to college/get more training	44.5
Want to get a job	38.8
Want to join the military	30.7
Want to get life on track	76.9
Overall health very good or excellent	66.0
Taking any medication	20.8
Overweight (BMI 25-29)[b]	20.8
Obese (BMI 30+)[b]	11.8
Ever drink alcohol or use drugs	36.2
Sample size	3,074

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used all available data for ChalleNGe sample members who completed a BIF.

Data for the "All Sites" column represent an average of all 3,074 sample members.

Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent where categories are not mutually exclusive.

[a]Race/ethnicity categories were constructed by counting as Hispanic those who checked both Hispanic and black or white. None of these sample members are counted as multiracial and grouped in the "other" category.

[b]Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared.

As shown in Table 2.1, most of the participants in the study are 17 years old, and about 84 percent are male.[2] Roughly equal proportions described themselves as white (41 percent) or African-American/black (40 percent); most of the rest described themselves as Hispanic. Almost all are U.S. citizens and were born in the United States, and only about 3 percent reported having any children of their own (not shown in the table).

Only 23 percent of the sample members lived with both biological parents when they entered the study; another 21 percent lived with a parent and a stepparent. More than 40 percent lived in a single-parent household (most commonly with their mother), and about 11 percent lived with no parent or stepparent. Fewer than one-third of sample members reported that their household received any public assistance, indicating that the ChalleNGe population is not, in general, extremely low income (though it is possible that some sample members were not aware that their household received public assistance).

As expected, the participants in the study had not done well in school before leaving. About half reported that their grades had been mostly Ds and Fs, and more than 80 percent reported that they had been suspended from school at least once. Nearly one-third reported that they had an Individual Education Plan, which indicates special education status.

About two-thirds of the study's participants characterized their health as very good or excellent. On the other hand, about one-third were either obese or overweight. About one-third reported that they had used drugs or alcohol, though sample members may have underreported their drug use if they believed that the baseline survey was actually part of the program's application process.

Differences Across Sites

In most respects, the characteristics of sample members are similar from program to program (see Appendix Table A.1). However, Table 2.2 shows a few areas where there are large disparities, likely driven by differences both in the population characteristics of the participating states and in the programs' recruiting practices.

Perhaps most noticeable are the differences in the racial and ethnic composition of the sample across sites. Three of the programs (Georgia, Illinois, and North Carolina) serve heavily African-American populations. In four other sites, the sample is predominantly Hispanic (California and New Mexico) or white (Michigan and Wisconsin). Some of the patterns are

[2]In some cycles, it was not possible to include female applicants in the random assignment pool, because the programs needed to accept all or nearly all female applicants, as female staff had already been hired to work with them. Thus, the percentage of females in the research sample is slightly lower than the percentage of females in the programs. Typically, about 20 percent of graduates nationwide are female.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 2.2

Selected Characteristics of ChalleNGe Sample Members at the Time of Random Assignment, by Site

Characteristic (%)	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Race/ethnicity[a]											
Hispanic	14.4	56.6	13.3	3.4	17.6	4.4	0.8	5.1	60.0	34.4	6.5
White	41.3	29.5	45.5	24.5	27.9	69.5	59.0	35.0	17.8	47.1	74.0
Black	40.1	7.8	37.0	68.7	52.5	20.8	37.4	54.8	2.2	16.9	8.4
Other	4.2	6.2	4.3	3.4	2.0	5.3	2.8	5.1	20.0	1.6	11.0
Speaks a non-English language at home	12.6	32.8	10.0	8.1	16.7	4.7	2.3	6.5	40.7	22.0	9.9
Anyone in household receives public assistance	29.5	22.7	14.6	25.3	39.6	19.0	30.5	27.8	46.1	23.0	25.5
Highest grade completed											
8th grade or lower	14.2	0.8	19.0	11.4	10.6	10.1	22.0	27.8	13.3	14.5	10.8
9th grade	31.4	13.8	35.6	40.5	25.5	33.9	33.8	35.9	32.2	38.2	28.4
10th grade	38.2	48.5	35.1	38.0	43.2	42.3	31.4	27.8	33.3	32.8	41.9
11th grade	15.6	35.4	10.2	9.5	19.8	13.4	11.8	8.5	21.1	14.5	18.2
12th grade	0.6	1.5	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.3	1.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.7
Ever arrested	31.1	17.3	33.2	26.9	32.9	28.2	20.5	31.5	62.1	33.9	48.0
Ever drinks alcohol or uses drugs	36.2	40.9	30.9	22.6	37.7	43.3	25.2	29.9	66.7	51.1	47.3
Sample size	3,074	130	211	325	941	343	389	299	92	190	154

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used all available data for ChalleNGe sample members who completed a BIF.
Data for the "All Sites" column represent an average of all 3,074 sample members.
Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent where categories are not mutually exclusive.
[a]Race/ethnicity categories were constructed by counting as Hispanic those who checked both Hispanic and black or white. None of these sample members are counted as multiracial and grouped in the "other" category.

predictable, given the demographic characteristics of the states, but others reflect the programs' recruiting strategies, which sometimes target particular areas of their states.

Likewise, the large differences across sites in the percentage of sample members who had been arrested likely reflect differences in recruiting strategies; some programs receive many referrals from juvenile justice authorities (although young people cannot be mandated into the program).[3]

The site visits conducted for the evaluation did not uncover any obvious differences in program implementation that seemed to be related to the differences across sites in the demographics of ChalleNGe program applicants.

Why Young People Came to ChalleNGe

Table 2.1 shows some of the reasons why sample members reported that they were interested in ChalleNGe. As might be expected, the most commonly cited reason was to get a General Educational Development certificate (GED) or a high school diploma or, more generally, to "get my life on track." Significant proportions of participants in the study were interested in military service or in employment.

Interviews with about 40 cadets conducted during site visits shed further light on their motivations — though it is important to note that the cadets who were interviewed had all shown up to ChalleNGe and completed the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase (all of the site visits took place during the Residential Phase); thus, they do not represent the full pool of applicants. As discussed in Chapter 4, approximately one-third of the program group either did not show up to the program or did not complete Pre-ChalleNGe.

The cadets who were interviewed were diverse in many respects. Some came from inner-city neighborhoods that suffer from violence, drugs, and poverty; others came from middle-class and even upper middle-class homes and had parents who were professionally employed. The cadets were also diverse in their gender; race; ethnicity; educational preparedness (scores on Tests of Adult Basic Education ranging from elementary-school level to beyond high school); age within the program's requirements; and even performance in the program, including some who were high-performing leaders and others who were struggling and even trying ChalleNGe for the second time after having been dismissed from a previous class.

[3]Young people are not eligible for ChalleNGe if they are: (1) currently on parole or probation for anything other than juvenile status offenses, (2) serving time or awaiting sentencing, (3) under indictment or charged, or (4) convicted of a felony or capital offense. A previous arrest or a conviction for a misdemeanor does not disqualify applicants.

The cadets were dressed in clean and neatly pressed uniforms, and their boots were polished and shiny. Their hair was cut short or groomed neatly. The cadets who were interviewed or observed were fresh-faced and clean and clear in eye and voice. They did not slouch or mumble. Their handshakes were firm but not aggressive. They looked directly into the eyes of those they were speaking to and always used "Sir" or "Ma'am" when addressing adults. They were also friendly. When passing an adult in a hallway or along a path, the cadets would stop and salute when appropriate; they received correction quietly and without reaction. Their attitudes were positive — even those of cadets who were struggling in the program academically or otherwise.

The interviews usually began with a discussion about the cadets' lives before they came to ChalleNGe. Common to their stories were the primary elements that typically drive the decision to attend this rigorous program: disengagement from school (truancy, disruptive behavior, disrespect for teachers and school authority, a sense that teachers did not care about them, victimization by bullies), conflict with parents (disrespectful behavior, family disintegration or dysfunction, parental substance abuse, physical abuse), negative social environments (gangs, violence, drug sales and use, poverty), a history of substance abuse, and a desire to have a GED or a diploma even though they were far behind in school.

In the following passages, one cadet from California's Grizzly ChalleNGe Academy talked about the disordered environment in which he grew up, his disaffection from school, as well as peer influences that contributed to his own poor choices and dysfunctional behavior. When confronted with the option to attend ChalleNGe, he was not interested at first. In fact, his friends encouraged him to run away from home to avoid the program. But after he had reflected on his behavior and acknowledged the pain he was causing his family, he felt a desire to change — his own desire, not his parents'— and he had thrived in the program. He said:

> They [my parents] both live together. They had problems when I was younger, kind of deep, personal problems that me and my family went through. I wasn't really living in a healthy environment when I was growing up….Then as I started getting older, I started using drugs, started getting in trouble with the law, hanging out with these different drug crowds, trying to get people to accept me, not for who I was but for something I was making up — from there I just went downhill.
>
> I dropped out for one semester of my ninth-grade year. Then I got expelled from high school around tenth grade. Before I came here, I had gotten expelled and I was about to [go back], but I came to ChalleNGe instead.
>
> [School was] hard. People were bullying me. Teachers, they didn't really pay too much attention to me. If I would ask for help they wouldn't help me at

> all. Instead, it was, just learn this. I didn't really like it….I got Fs. I wouldn't turn in my homework. Most of the time I would ditch school, just go hang out and smoke pot.
>
> [I heard about ChalleNGe] through my mom. My mom surprised me. My mom found this program. First she wanted me to go to a boot camp, but she found out about this one, how it changes you, how it gives you credits in education. My mom wanted me to come. The first question you asked about my friends supporting it, they weren't supporting, and, of course, I wasn't supporting it as well. "Screw this! I ain't going to join this." But seeing my mom cry, seeing the way I treated my little brother, made me want to change that. I'm like, you know what, this isn't the life I want to live.

Another cadet, from New Mexico, came from a "stable" home — both of her parents were working in law enforcement — yet she was disengaged from her family and from school and had been charged with Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) at age 16. She said:

> I was still enrolled in school. I was living on my own for about a year. I got an apartment with a friend. And I got a DWI charge, and so I had to move back with my mother, and me and my mother bump heads a lot. And led to bigger conflicts, and I wound up running away from home. And I turned myself in, and so I got put in jail for like two days. I mean, I'm not the type of kid that gets in trouble. I mean, my parents are high in law. My dad's the [job title] in [town name]. My mom works at the [office name]. So I was in a real big — like, nobody expected me to get to that point to where I was at.
>
> So the judge and my PO [probation office] counselor said, you know, there's this really good program called ChalleNGe. You know, you'll get your high school diploma, you'll get college credits, and if you go on successfully and complete the program, we'll clear your record except for your DWI charge, 'cause they can't do that, so...I agreed to come.

A cadet from Florida was far behind in his schooling, taking ninth-grade classes at age 18. He decided to come to ChalleNGe to avoid the "drawn-out" process of completing his education. He described his circumstances this way:

> My mother thought I was joining the military, so that kind of panicked her a little bit, but I explained to her that this isn't the military; it's a military school — a "military-funded school" was the correct term. And I told her that I'm not really making a dent around here, so this school would probably

> be a little bit better for me, not to mention it's shorter. I don't have to go through a lot of long, drawn-out stuff.

A female cadet from Michigan described the things that influenced her decision to attend ChalleNGe:

> I'm from….a really small town. I was doing horrible [in school] there. I hated high school. Just everything about it. I just hated it. I hated the classes; I hated the people.
>
> The main reason I came here was to stop, like, all the partying scene and everything; I was getting really sick of that. I had a lot of friends that partied every weekend. So I was in the group with them, and it's pretty much all I did. I didn't listen to my parents when they told me not to, and, like, they'd always try to do family things, and I'd just kind of go with my friends. I realized that there was nothing going for me there, so I needed a change.
>
> Going into my third year in high school as a freshman; that was pretty bad. And then my real dad ended up going back to prison, and that made me, like, think a lot.

One cadet faced the difficult circumstances of losing both her brother and her father to violence in her South Central Los Angeles neighborhood. She withdrew from her mother and adopted an "I don't care" attitude about most things in her life, especially about school. She said:

> South Central LA is not a nice place to be. Drugs. I never use drugs, but my brother used to gang bang, and he got shot and died. So, you know, my dad got shot and died too; so it's just only me and my mom. So my mom, she had to, you know, take care of me and be mom and dad to me. So it's like I don't have a father figure in my life at all, but my mother.
>
> So, you know, LA was getting too bad, and I was messing up at school. You know, talking back to teachers, being disrespectful to my mom and to the teachers and to adults, period. So my mom would like, you know, be crying. "Why do you do this? Why do you do this to me?" You know, and I was like, I just was like, "Whatever." You know, go to my room, go to sleep. Same routine over and over again. I just — I don't know, I would be so disrespectful to teachers…be very disrespectful.

Her mother, like many parents of applicants, became desperate for help and began to look for a program for her daughter. Her mother happened to learn of Grizzly ChalleNGe

Academy from one of her daughter's teachers and began to investigate. As seems to be the case for many cadets who hear about the program from their parents, the daughter resisted, telling her mother, "I'm not going here, you know. You can stop showing me this because I'm not going to go." She continued to argue against being sent to "military school" but after consulting with another relative, decided to "[pray] about it. I was like, 'Is this the thing I should do?'" Her mother drove her to the program for a visit. "I was like, 'Maybe it is cool.' So I filled out the application."

Surprisingly few cadets mentioned hearing about ChalleNGe through traditional recruitment efforts, such as public service announcements or presentations by recruiters (though it is possible that their parents had been reached by these efforts). In contrast, many cadets reported hearing about the program from friends or family who were former cadets. A typical cadet reaction was, "I saw how much he/she changed and wanted that for myself." In other cases, desperate parents were searching for help and saw ChalleNGe as a last resort. Often, the parents were looking into military schools. In those cases, the typical reaction of their children was: "I didn't want to go but changed my mind when I heard more about it. I wanted to stop hurting my family."

Most of the cadets who were interviewed reported that their families were overwhelmingly supportive and relieved that the cadet had made a choice to try to change negative behavior. In contrast, friends were often unsupportive, primarily because the cadet would be away for a "long time," and the decision to change brought into question the negative behavior and activities the cadet had shared with friends.

ChalleNGe Staff

The stated mission of the ChalleNGe program is to "intervene in and reclaim the lives of at-risk youth to produce program graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults." Interviews with program staff across job title and function revealed that they understood and embraced the official mission. Across the sites, ChalleNGe staff talked about helping produce "productive citizens," using techniques like coaching, mentoring, training, and teaching. Those who have daily contact with the cadets pointed to the "distraction-free environment" in ChalleNGe and the emphasis on teaching young people about choices as key to the program's success — "No matter what you do, there are consequences." They see the cadets as individuals and work to build their self-esteem. "It's not about tearing these kids down. You have to build them up," said one program director. "Every child is important; they just need someone to listen to them" and "We try to be role models" were common sentiments.

Figure 2.1 shows the typical staffing structure of a ChalleNGe program. Each program is led by a Program Director, who reports to the state's Adjutant General, the official in charge of the state's Military Affairs agency. In most programs, a Deputy Director reports to the Program Director. The largest contingent of the staff are the cadre (or team leaders), who directly supervise the cadets day and night. The cadre generally report to the Commandant. A group of teachers is responsible for classroom instruction, and a team of counselors works with the cadets one on one and in groups. As discussed further below, the programs divide responsibility for the eight core components across these staff in somewhat different ways.

In addition to these staff, the Recruitment, Placement, and Mentoring (RPM) department is responsible for recruiting and screening applicants, screening and training mentors, and interacting with cadets and mentors during the Postresidential Phase. This department usually includes recruiters, a Mentor Coordinator, and a team of case managers who work directly with cadets and their mentors.

Finally, the left side of Figure 2.1 shows the staff responsible for various logistical functions, such as budget and management information systems.

The programs develop staffing levels according to a "manning model," which dictates the type and maximum number of staff persons in each function. The manning model also assigns the requisite General Schedule (GS) salary level for each position.[4] The actual cost of the position will vary depending on GS schedules for the various areas of the country. In many cases, funding is not sufficient to fill all the positions that appear in the model. Therefore, each state program determines the best way to deploy resources to maintain a safe and stable program while achieving its program objectives. A typical 100-bed program employs 50 to 52 staff. Of those, about 28 are cadre or operational staff, and 22 to 24 are support and administrative staff.

In a recent paper, Daniel Donohue, who played a leading role in designing ChalleNGe while serving as a Special Assistant to the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, emphasized the importance of a multidisciplinary staffing structure:

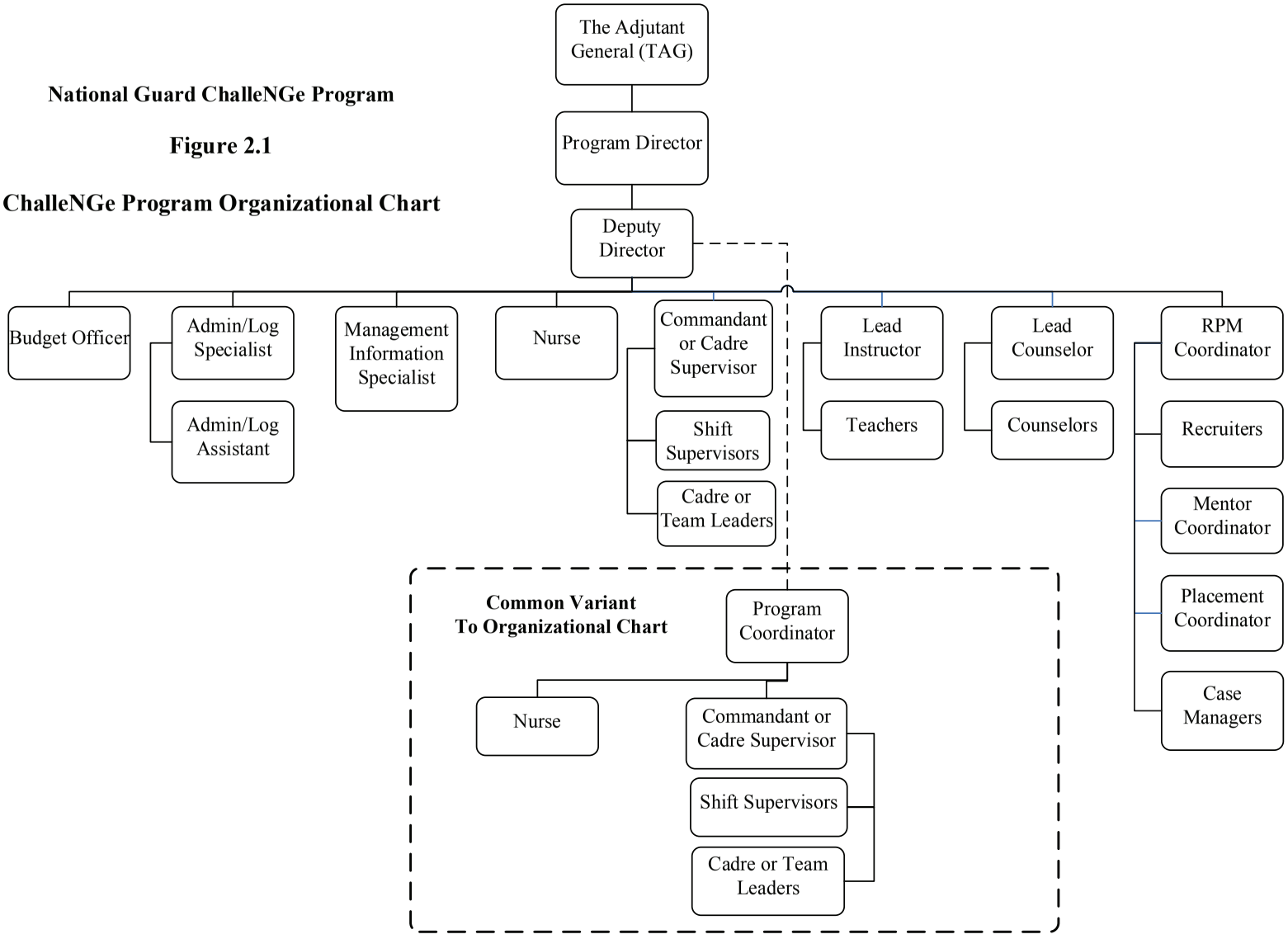
> We recognized that no one career field was capable of meeting the varied needs and objectives, so we developed a triad of broad specialties. While ChalleNGe is built on a quasi-military model, it is not a military program. The staff is comprised of a team of state certified educators, state certified

[4]ChalleNGe staff are state employees, contract employees, or teachers employed by a local school district. However, salaries supported by funds governed by the Master Cooperative Agreement between the state and the National Guard Bureau cannot exceed the requisite GS level for the position and geographic area.

National Guard ChalleNGe Program

Figure 2.1

ChalleNGe Program Organizational Chart



> social, career and psychological counselors, and a state selected cadre of full time personnel, most of whom are military veterans, military retirees or members of the Guard and reserves working…as civilian employees. No one field is more important than the other — they carry equal weight and importance — the legs of a three-legged stool, if you will.[5]

Although military veterans, retirees, and Guard members form only one of the three legs of the stool, it is common for many of the staff, including counselors, recruiters, case managers, and even some teachers, to have military experience. Many staff are National Guard members, and deployment of some of these staff to Iraq and Afghanistan has affected all the ChalleNGe programs to some degree. Because by law the programs must hold the same or equitable positions open for these servicemen and women, they either operate short-staffed or rely on contract workers to fill the gaps.

The rest of this chapter briefly describes the major staff categories.

Program Director and Deputy Director

The Program Director and his or her Deputy Director are responsible for all program elements: personnel management, budget, outreach, facilities, and communication and coordination with state headquarters and the National Guard Bureau. Across programs, Program Directors and Deputy Directors said that both positions are integral to running a successful program, and in many cases they reported that their experience and backgrounds were complimentary. For example at Seaborne ChalleNGe in Texas, the director comes from a nonmilitary background — the nonprofit and foundation world — while the deputy is a former marine drill sergeant. Their varied experiences fit together well for the demands of the quasi-military program.

Functionally, the positions are designed to complement each other. The Program Director focuses more on external matters, on marketing, fundraising, policy, state and federal government relations, and community relations. In most cases, the Program Director is at a senior officer grade if he or she is or was in the military, which is helpful at both the state and federal levels. The Deputy Director, on the other hand, is more focused on internal responsibilities, on program management, human resources, cadet affairs, and so on. If the Deputy Director has a military background, he or she will more likely be a junior officer or a senior non-commissioned officer with a strong background in operations. Many of the Deputy Directors have been promoted from inside the program, while the Program Directors are often hired from the outside.

[5]Donohue (2008).

Many of the Program Directors have both military and civilian experience. For example, one director has a Ph.D. in psychology, in addition to a long military career. Another retired as a brigadier general after a 30-year military career and has a master's degree in education. Of the 10 programs in the evaluation, two were directed by women during the study period.

The director's philosophy may profoundly shape the program's environment. For example, career military leaders are more likely to operate a program that adheres strictly to the military structure that undergirds the program. Leaders with more extensive civilian experience are more likely to implement programs that synthesize psychological or other management approaches with military principles. For example, the director mentioned above, who has a Ph.D. in psychology, runs the program according to psychiatrist William Glasser's Choice Theory.[6]

Cadre

The Commandant is in charge of implementing ChalleNGe's "training mission." His or her main responsibilities include ensuring the safety of cadets in the Residential Phase, facilitating training of cadre, and monitoring training of cadets by maintaining the daily training schedule — what the cadets do from moment to moment throughout the day. The Commandant may also take responsibility for community service programming. The commandants generally report to the Deputy Director and are responsible for communication with other departments, such as in staff meetings.

The Cadre Supervisor directly supervises the Shift Supervisors (platoon leaders, sergeants first class) and the cadre, who directly supervise the cadets. The cadre ensure the safety of cadets, give on-the-spot correction when needed, and make sure the cadets are where they need to be at any particular point in the day. They wake the cadets in the morning and see that they take care of their personal hygiene and dress appropriately. During the school day, the cadre may sit in classrooms or patrol the area around classrooms, again correcting cadets' behavior as needed. They direct cadets through physical training, as well as drill and ceremony exercises (marching, flag ceremonies), take them to their meals, monitor their homework in the evening, and even arrange for bathroom breaks. Overall, the job of the cadre is to keep the cadets on task at all times throughout the day.

The cadre are considered as the heart of the program, in that they have the most direct and constant contact with the cadets. They are the people the cadets turn to for guidance and support. The cadre oversee the activities of the cadets around the clock, with two shifts during

[6]For more information on Choice Theory, see www.wglasser.com.

the cadets' waking hours and one night shift. In interviews, cadre reported that three-quarters of their job involves listening to and counseling the cadets.

The cadre come from a variety of backgrounds; however, a large majority have some military experience, ranging from one term of service to retirement from a full military career. Many reported learning of the opportunity to work in ChalleNGe from a friend who was employed by the program. Many of those interviewed seemed to regard ChalleNGe as a good postretirement or postenlistment job. Military retirees tend to be younger than average retirees; their relative youth in combination with their military experience makes them ideal ChalleNGe cadre — mature and experienced.[7] Many had attended leadership school in the course of their military careers, where they learned specific techniques that they saw as crucial to their work as cadre.

A team leader in North Carolina provides a good example of a typical cadre. He applied for the cadre job toward the end of his more than 22 years of active duty service. While on active duty, he had received extensive leadership training. Like many other cadre interviewed, he reported a strong interest in working with young people and brought a lot of such experience to the program. In addition to raising a fairly large family with his wife while he was on active duty, he also worked with the Boy and Girl Scouts and with youth groups affiliated with his church. During the interview, he talked about consciously bringing his past experience to bear in his management and instruction of cadets and in helping to resolve conflicts, while remaining open to new techniques.

Instructors

All programs have at least six full-time instructors, and most have more. The instructors teach the GED subject courses — math, science, writing and language arts, and computer skills. In addition to Academic Excellence, they teach parts of other core components, including Responsible Citizenship and Job Skills. They also frequently participate in some extracurricular activities, like field trips.

The ChalleNGe programs vary among states in the sources of their instructional staff. Some programs hire instructors directly; in other programs, teachers come to ChalleNGe from the local school district (they are sometimes deployed to ChalleNGe under state charter school rules) or from community colleges. Instructional activities run along class cycles and do not take place before or after the Residential Phase.

[7]Some programs had temporarily lost their most experienced and mature cadre to deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and had to fill these positions with less experienced staff. These programs had some difficulty managing these less mature cadre. Issues arose around judgment, overly harsh treatment of cadets (as in a boot camp), and retaining staff in their positions.

Counselors

Counseling departments are headed by the Lead Counselor, who supervises individual counselors. The Lead Counselor typically reports to the Deputy Director. Most of the counseling staff hold either bachelor's or master's degrees in psychology, social work, mental health, alcohol and drug counseling, or school counseling. In some programs, the counselors, typically called Career Counselors, focus primarily on placement activities and refer out most of the therapeutic counseling. In other cases, the counselors conduct both placement counseling and psychological counseling.

The Texas program is an example of the latter. A counselor there identified his typical activities as individual counseling, group counseling (for example, on management of conflict, anger, and stress), career counseling (for individuals and for groups in classes), disciplinary board reviews, crisis intervention, and parent counseling. He went on to describe the counselors as liaisons between the cadets and other adults, either parents or program staff, such as instructors or cadre. In his estimation, because counselors do not directly supervise the cadets, their position allows them to gain additional and pertinent information from cadets about the difficulties they face that may shed light on their behavior, which may be unknown to either parents or other program staff who supervise the cadets more directly. He says, "If problems arise, counselors can be buffers between kids, parents, team leaders. We cover the gaps in expectations between the parties — expectations are different."

Counseling staff frequently teach aspects of the core components, including Life-Coping Skills, Job Skills, and Health and Hygiene. Counselors receive guidance from the national program regarding what needs to be covered but can approach the subjects according to the counselor's preference and style and the resources available within the program and in the community. The counseling staff are also often, but not always, responsible for the development of the Postresidential Action Plan (P-RAP), also known as the MAP (My Action Plan or Master Action Plan), which helps the cadets set short-, medium-, and long-term goals.[8]

Recruitment, Placement, and Mentoring (RPM)

The RPM department is responsible for all activities before and after the Residential Phase. Most programs have recruiters who travel around the state to talk to interested young people, parents, school principals, and other youth professionals about the program. Some programs also have mentor coordinators who process mentor applications; conduct mentor and "mentee," or protégé, training; and ensure that all candidates are matched with a mentor by the

[8]At some posts, as in North Carolina, the MAP is primarily developed in the instruction department.

middle of the class cycle. Case managers work on postresidential placement of cadets and monitor cadet-mentor relationships during the Postresidential Phase.

The focus of the RPM department is largely external and community-based. While RPM staff work with young people both before and after each class cycle, most of the other staff tend to shift their focus to the new enrollees as each class arrives. Perhaps for this reason, in some programs, it has been difficult to make the case for adequate levels of funding and staffing for the RPM department. The organization and resourcing of this department are uneven across the participating programs and are often below recommended levels. In addition, state ChalleNGe programs vary widely in the staffing structure and size of their RPM operations. Some states operate with all three program functions — recruitment, placement, and mentoring — united in one office. In this case, all staff functions are under the direction of the RPM coordinator. In other cases, RPM activities are divided. For example, in Mississippi, the RPM coordinator supervises placement and mentoring activities only. Recruitment activities there are under the purview of the director. In Wisconsin, case management and mentor training activities are under the direction of the counseling department. Some programs operate with many part-time case managers, while others have just a few full-time case managers.

The California program has no recruiters and relies instead on unpaid supporters of the program for marketing and publicity. These people, mostly former cadets, parents of cadets, and other program staff, speak about ChalleNGe to interested groups and publicize the program in other ways. Parents have been particularly effective in talking to other parents of at-risk youth, writing letters to their local newspapers, and even discussing the program with local elected officials.[9]

****

With the stage set, the following chapter describes how ChalleNGe operates in the programs that participated in the study.

[9]Historically, because of these outreach constraints, Grizzly ChalleNGe — the California program — has had a fairly limited reach, drawing participants mostly from Los Angeles County and south of San Luis Obispo, where the program is located. In an effort to expand outreach and handle inquiries, Grizzly relies increasingly on its Web presence and an 800 number. At the time of the field visit, about one-third of applications were coming in from northern California.

Chapter 3

The Program: How ChalleNGe Operates

This chapter describes the implementation of the ChalleNGe program. It is organized chronologically, starting with the recruitment and application process and then discussing the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase, the Residential Phase, and, finally, the Postresidential Phase.

Most of the information in this chapter comes from site visits to the 10 programs participating in the study. During each visit, members of the research team interviewed staff in all of the major divisions, observed some program activities, reviewed key documents, and interviewed a small number of cadets. The chapter aims to provide a broad overview of how ChalleNGe operates on the ground and to describe some key areas of variation across the sites. The analysis does not attempt to describe each of the 10 programs in detail or to assess their performance.[1]

As the chapter describes, ChalleNGe programs are recognizably similar across the country in the terminology they use, their staffing structure, and the core components of the program. However, there is significant variation in some areas, such as in the approach to discipline, the organization of educational activities, and the military characteristics of the program's environment.

Also, it is important to note at the outset that although ChalleNGe programs operate according to an established model, their implementation is not without difficulties. Notable challenges for program leaders, which are discussed throughout the chapter, include staffing shortages related to deployment of staff to Iraq and Afghanistan, stagnant and decreasing funding levels, wide variation in the academic preparedness of participants, and monitoring cadet-mentor relationships and cadet placements in the Postresidential Phase of the program.

Recruitment and Application

The recruitment process begins several months before each class cycle starts. Interested young people and their families prepare and submit applications to their state ChalleNGe program, where recruitment or admissions office staff process them. Once the applications are processed, most programs interview applicants individually, and those who are accepted receive invitations to attend Pre-ChalleNGe.

[1]AOC Solutions, working under contract to the Department of Defense, is responsible for ongoing assessment of all the ChalleNGe programs. This evaluation is distinct from the annual AOC assessment.

The Recruitment, Placement, and Mentoring (RPM) departments rely on several different strategies to recruit candidates. Many programs employ recruiters who travel around the state to market ChalleNGe directly to referral sources (for example, schools, juvenile justice agencies, and community centers) and to interested families through meetings and presentations. The meetings typically include a formal presentation by the recruiter and may also include a presentation by program "ambassadors" — current or former cadets who describe the experience, challenges, and benefits of ChalleNGe.

To extend outreach, some programs have developed marketing campaigns that include television, radio, Internet, and newspaper advertising. Staff describe these activities, especially television advertising, as "basic," and some feel that these types of outreach are not very effective, because the message is unlikely to reach the right person at the right time. Parents and young people typically do not consider ChalleNGe until they are in crisis. Therefore, programs rely heavily on word of mouth from parents and former cadets who are able to tell other struggling families about the program.[2]

As noted, some programs are limited by lack of resources to targeting their recruitment to certain parts of their state; others confine their recruitment to certain segments of their state's population for philosophical reasons that often reflect the director's judgment regarding whom the program can best serve. For example in Wisconsin, the director believes that the program and its staff can best serve young people who do not come from inner-city neighborhoods, such as in Milwaukee. The Michigan program, likewise, does not recruit heavily in Detroit and fills the program's slots from other areas of the state. In Georgia, the selection process is designed to ensure an equal racial balance, as well as to admit applicants who are strong contenders for earning a General Educational Development certificate (GED).

Applications can be submitted either online or by mail and are initially screened for basic eligibility criteria, such as age and school status. Once an application passes the initial screening, the applicant is invited for a brief personal interview in most states. The appointment, which may take place at the program site or at various other locations around the state, usually includes a drug test and administration of Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in reading and math, in addition to an interview.

The main goal of the interview is to determine the level of motivation and the degree of personal responsibility the applicant takes for his or her behavior. Most staff believe that unless a young person is willing to volunteer for the program without threat, coercion, or sanction, he or she is unlikely to complete it and that applicants must demonstrate some degree of responsibility

[2]As noted in Chapter 2, few of the cadets who were interviewed mentioned learning about ChalleNGe from recruiters. More common means included hearing about the program from a former cadet (friend or relative) or through a parent's Internet search.

for their problems and express a desire to change. According to one director, "…we interview the kid and the parents and try to determine if this is something that mommy and daddy want the kid to do or the kid really wants to make a change." Applicants who fail the drug test are often allowed to proceed, but staff inform them that ChalleNGe is a drug-free program and that they will be retested during the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase at some point between the first day of the program and the first day of the third week. They must be drug-free at that point.

The programs have different approaches to screening. Some programs — typically those that routinely receive many more applicants than they can accept — are fairly selective and sometimes accept fewer than half the applicants whom they interview. A few programs screen out applicants who exhibit "red flags," such as criminal behavior, psychological problems, gang affiliation, or even very low TABE scores. However, programs more commonly screen applicants based on their motivation. One director frankly reported that "we've intentionally made our application process cumbersome because it gets us kids who really want to be here." All programs are assessed according to their performance (for example, graduation rates and GED pass rates) and will tend to perform better on these measures if they can accept applicants who are more likely to succeed.[3]

In contrast, other programs struggle to recruit enough applicants and cannot afford to do much screening. As noted in Chapter 1, there were many class cycles in which random assignment could not be conducted because the number of qualified applicants was barely sufficient to fill the program slots. Some programs report specific obstacles to recruitment. For example, school districts that operate alternative schools for out-of-school youth or students with behavior problems may be reluctant to refer them to ChalleNGe, as the districts stand to lose state Average Daily Attendance funding for those students.[4] It is also possible that the program's relatively narrow eligibility criteria — particularly the prohibition on accepting applicants who are seriously involved with the justice system — may end up disqualifying many dropouts.

Recruitment staff at a number of programs noted that ChalleNGe is not the type of program that families plan for. They do not come looking for this type of help until they have run out of other options and are desperate. Application flows reflect this somewhat. Some programs have more difficulty filling the winter class than the summer class, because parents may hold

[3]Being more selective may produce better *outcomes* but will not necessarily produce better *impacts* in a random assignment study. Since random assignment was conducted from among a pool of applicants considered acceptable by the programs, both the program and control groups will likely perform better in a site that is more selective.

[4]Many states fund school districts based on student attendance, commonly known as Average Daily Attendance, which is calculated by dividing the total number of days of student attendance (presence in the school, at a school-related function, or being supervised by a school district staff person) by the number of days of school taught during the period in question.

out hope that their child's school performance will improve. Once it is clear that the child is failing at the end of the second semester, the parents decide to pursue ChalleNGe. Programs also tend to receive many late applications, often after the official deadline. Those that struggle with recruitment will often accept these late applications.

It is important to note that the evaluation may have marginally changed the age profile of the ChalleNGe cadets. Staff in several programs reported that, under normal circumstances, they would give preference to older applicants, because older youths have fewer opportunities to reapply if they are not accepted and tend to be more mature and motivated (younger applicants would be told to reapply for a later cycle). As noted in Chapter 2, however, the *youngest* applicants were excluded from random assignment. Thus, the random assignment process ended up placing some older applicants in the control group and, in effect, filling their beds with very young applicants who were not eligible for the study. Although the youngest youths are not part of the study and do not directly affect the results, staff in several programs reported that having a greater proportion of younger cadets changed the dynamics of the program, often for the worse. Staff reported higher levels of discipline problems caused by more immature cadets who are also more likely to quit the program and generally make the job of the ChalleNGe staff more difficult.

Although these staff perceptions may be accurate, the data in Appendix Table A.2 show that overall graduation rates (including those of both study participants and younger youths who were not eligible for the study) were not systematically lower during the class cycles when random assignment took place.

The Pre-ChalleNGe Phase

Applicants are notified whether they have been selected to enter the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase about two or three weeks before the start of the class cycle. As discussed in Chapter 1, Pre-ChalleNGe is a two-week intake and orientation period, in which young people enter the program as candidates and begin to learn the standard operating procedures — the protocols, routines, expectations, and demands of the program. As one team leader said in Wisconsin, "the whole first two weeks is training them as to what is expected of them in the program."

Most staff interviewed about Pre-ChalleNGe refer to it as an adjustment period for young people whose lives have been unstructured. They may be disengaged from school, in defiance of parental authority, using drugs or alcohol, unemployed, or have no schedule or responsibilities. In ChalleNGe, they are expected to live completely structured lives. There is discipline; there are positive and negative consequences for behavior; and candidates are responsible to authority figures, fellow candidates, and themselves. According to one cadre in Mississippi, the transition can be a "rude awakening for some of these kids." A Georgia cadet

agreed: "…it's a lot harder than what I thought it would be. I mean you got to get used to so much stuff. You know, because you got to get used to different people and stuff like that, so it's kind of hard."

The sentiment of this cadet reflects the view of some program staff. However, other staff and even some cadets said that they thought Pre-ChalleNGe was too easy and that the staff should be "harder" on the candidates — that there should be higher levels of discipline and challenges in order to bring out the best from candidates.

Day One

In most cases, parents or guardians deliver their children to the ChalleNGe post. Parents say goodbye and get a briefing regarding what to expect during the next few months — for example, how to communicate with their child during Pre-ChalleNGe and beyond. Parents are also encouraged to not succumb to their child's pleas to come home and to allow him or her to complete the assimilation process. Some programs use a "contract," signed by both the parent and the child, to try to ensure that the candidate will stay at least through Pre-ChalleNGe.

Program intake involves processing paperwork (for example, medical forms and releases), a physical examination by the medical staff, declaration of contraband (most often gum, candy, or cigarettes), haircuts for males, distribution of clothing — usually only "sweats" or physical training (PT) gear[5] — and orientation to the barracks and post. Most programs conduct intake for male and female candidates separately and initiate a no-fraternization policy.

As noted, candidates must be drug-free to enter ChalleNGe, and all candidates are tested for drugs during Pre-ChalleNGe. In some programs, as in Wisconsin and Florida, candidates are tested for drugs on arrival as part of the intake process. Others, as in Mississippi and New Mexico, wait until the end of Pre-ChalleNGe to do tests. In most cases, candidates who test "hot" for drugs are released and sent home immediately. Some programs allow for some discretion on day one, though candidates are not allowed to graduate from Pre-ChalleNGe if they fail a drug test. Programs reported that they generally lose between 10 and 30 candidates who fail drug tests during Pre-ChalleNGe (see Chapter 4 for data on attrition rates in ChalleNGe programs).

After intake processing, the cadre take over, and the "training mission" begins immediately. Candidates are formed into squads and brought to their barracks. They must quickly get used to the new demands, routines, and people they come in contact with — and this is not easy. A cadet from California remembered his intake day: "As soon as we came in, they searched us

[5]Most programs do not distribute uniforms until candidates complete Pre-ChalleNGe.

and took us up to the barracks. I saw these bunks, these twin little beds. They assigned my bunk, and I saw the guy sleeping under and right away I didn't like him. Because of the way I was…I didn't like nobody. I really wanted to ask, 'Who are all these people?'"

In some programs, as in Florida and New Mexico, the intake day is described as "low key." Staff do not take a "boot camp" approach and yell at the candidates. Similarly, the Deputy Director from Mississippi encourages his staff to see the candidates as individuals, not as a set of problems. "We try to instill this in the cadre. It's not about beating these kids down. They're already down. It's about building them up. They have violence down pat. They knew that before they got here."

Other programs are more "traditional": The cadre use loud voices to get the candidates' attention and direct them. A cadet from Georgia described his first day:

> It was hell. Yeah, it was rough, man. Right when they got in front of us, "Get off the bus! Get off the bus!" Yelling at us, getting our hair cut, screaming all the time. I was like "Gaah! This is going to be…this is going…Crap, I've got to get out of here!" But the sergeants helped me get through it…telling me "You've got to stay! You've got to get through it. We'll get through it together."

This counseling message — that the cadre are there to help candidates through the program — begins on day one and is consistent throughout the program. Nevertheless, some candidates change their minds about participating on intake day and go back home with their parents or guardians before starting the program.

As noted earlier, for some programs, gang affiliation can raise a "red flag" if it is detected during the application process. However, other programs do accept gang-affiliated applicants, and gang affiliation is reported to be a significant problem in certain programs. The programs do all they can to minimize the impact of gang-related behavior among candidates and cadets. For example, the California program tries not to assign to the same squad participants from the same area who have different gang affiliations. Over time, as participants understand the impact of gang affiliation, they are offered a tattoo removal service to erase the physical reminders of past affiliations.

The Mississippi program reported serious problems with gang-affiliated youth in recent cycles. Program staff reported that they were dealing with more fights and intimidation, as well as gambling and extortion and higher levels of attrition among this subset of the population. According to a senior staff member:

> The education community doesn't want to fully acknowledge that the problem exists because they're not in a position to do anything about it. The

> beauty of our program is that the kids spend the night here. We have them 24/7. Everything from after-school programs to midnight basketball is never going to work until you restore morals, values, and standards and enforce them in the home.

Candidates receive a handbook containing the standard operating procedures — the program's standards regarding dress, behavior, conduct, hygiene, maintenance of personal belongings and barracks, and so forth. The cadre understand that it is their job to teach candidates how to do everything that is expected of them, from mopping a floor to making a bed, from personal hygiene to marching in formation or stopping and saluting the staff. Candidates immediately begin to learn the proper way to communicate with staff and other participants. For example, they must ask permission to speak to the staff and must address them as "sir" or "ma'am." In Wisconsin, candidates may not speak to one another at all during the first two weeks of the program, a policy instituted to help avoid the formation of cliques and to encourage the cadets to listen more attentively. This Wisconsin cadet recalls:

> …for two weeks to not talk…not even a hand gesture communication type of thing. Everyone talked [though]. And that was a hard one, but that taught a lot of discipline, to stand on a line for two hours and not talk to no one.

Other programs limit talking among candidates but do not prohibit it. Many programs adopt the West Point standard of no talking in the dining hall. Talking too much or inappropriately is a significant problem for participants in ChalleNGe. Many cadets interviewed reported that most of the disciplinary infractions they had incurred were related either to speaking without permission or being rude, questioning orders, or complaining.

The First Two Weeks

The goals of the Pre-ChalleNGe phase are to build teamwork and identity within the platoons and to bolster candidates' self-esteem and self-efficacy. During the Pre-ChalleNGe phase, the staff assess candidates' readiness for the program in terms of physical readiness, ability to follow instructions, potential for leadership, and, most important, attitude. Candidates, to varying degrees, reported difficulty adjusting to receiving orders from adults and not being able to push back, as a Michigan participant explained:

> I thought it was going to be really hard when people yell in my face, that I'd get upset or scream back. At first it really was hard at Pre-ChalleNGe. I got in trouble a couple of times. I get really, really mad, because at home I'm used to people yelling at me and I'd yell right back. Here you can't do that. This place teaches you that sometimes you have to choose your battles

> wisely. Sometimes you have to just walk away, so that kind of prepared me for later, when I get out of here.

This need to assess readiness, however, tends to be balanced by the desire to retain candidates in the program. In some cases, programs may retain less promising candidates because they need the numbers. In other cases, the philosophy is to retain as many candidates as possible to give them every chance to succeed. Homesickness, discomfort with new people, and difficulty dealing with the structure and the demands of the program put heavy pressure on the candidates during this initial phase. Some of them give up and leave the program.

In addition to helping individual candidates make it through the initiation period, cadre must also begin to instill a sense of team membership and teamwork within the squads and platoons. This transformation of individual identity to team identity is fundamental to ChalleNGe's quasi-military approach; it is called "platoon identity." Part of the teamwork-building comes during joint exercises, such as learning how to march in formation or physical fitness competitions among the squads. Other lessons about teamwork and accountability come through mass discipline — that is, during Pre-ChalleNGe (and early in the Residential Phase), entire squads may be disciplined when one member breaks a rule. This teaches the candidates that they are "in this together."

Some staff referred to Pre-ChalleNGe as the most "counseling-heavy" period within a cycle. Staff from all the different sections (cadre, counseling, senior staff) end up working with candidates to keep them in the program. Many staff discussed the "parent call" that many candidates make after counseling efforts are exhausted to ask permission to come home. As noted earlier, staff prepare parents for these calls during interviews and on intake day and encourage them to be firm and not give in to manipulation or false promises of changed behavior. Staff reported that sometimes children do persuade their parents to let them quit the program and come home; other times parents say no. Some programs also involve prospective mentors in the discussion with a candidate who wants to leave the program. Often, this is more effective because the mentor is less likely to be an enabler and is more objective than a parent.

The Pre-ChalleNGe Phase is dominated by physical instruction — physical training, drill and ceremonies, races and other physical competitions, and even some physical discipline (such as push-ups or standing at attention). The cadets interviewed seemed to understand the purpose of the physically demanding training, as this cadet from Florida recalled: "Basically, everything they do is to show us how we can do whatever we put our minds to." There are no academic activities but, between formal physical activities, drilling, and training on standard operating procedures, candidates are busy for 16 hours a day.

Candidates also go through a process of detoxification from their former lifestyle during these early weeks of the program. Many of those interviewed reported that lack of regular sleep,

junk food, overeating, cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs were common elements in their lives before they came to ChalleNGe. The cadets interviewed appeared to learn in ChalleNGe that "harmless" substances could be bad for them, as this cadet from Wisconsin noted: "Your body was going through detox, not just of alcohol or cigarettes and stuff, but sodas, chips. All just common food that you think doesn't hurt you but it does. So when they were getting all that out of our bodies through sweat, it was most difficult."

As noted, the cadre are with the candidates every moment of the day, making sure that they are where they are supposed to be and are doing what they should be doing. The cadre are constantly evaluating candidates' progress, strengths, and weaknesses. At the end of the two-week period, candidates need to be "squared away" in their mastery of "the basics," such as bunk and barracks maintenance; marching, saluting, and addressing others; mealtime procedures; and personal hygiene.

Pre-ChalleNGe culminates with a ceremony in which the candidates are promoted to cadet status. This ceremony can be meaningful to the new cadets, as they may be experiencing the first significant success in their lives. A cadet from California described his feeling after the ceremony:

> After Pre-ChalleNGe I felt I accomplished something. I made it at Pre-ChalleNGe. I called my mom and I bursted out crying. I said "Mom, I made it!" and Mom said, "I knew you had it in you. Don't give up!" "I won't, Mom." That made me feel real great.

Although they regard Pre-ChalleNGe graduation as important, staff at some posts report that they have downplayed the significance of the ceremony, because some cadets felt that they had graduated after finishing Pre-ChalleNGe, "when the program hadn't really even begun yet." After the ceremony, cadets are issued uniforms and in some cases may move from temporary to permanent barracks. A few candidates who showed promise but were unable to meet program standards may be held back from the ceremony but allowed to remain in the program. They are evaluated for an additional week, when they either pass into the Residential Phase or are sent home.

The Residential Phase

The "training mission" continues as the new cadets move into the Residential Phase. Cadets typically rise at 5:30 a.m. and take care of their personal hygiene. During their day, they go to meals, attend classes and tutoring, participate in physical training, maintain their barracks, attend group meetings, meet with counselors, do homework, write letters home, and go to bed before 10 p.m. Their days are filled with activities, and they have very little unstructured time.

Cadets in the interviews talked about how they felt during the early days of the cycle. Many experienced fear, anger, or hostility. Having to perform at a high level, getting used to many new people — peers and authority figures — and being corrected for misbehavior, especially, was difficult for cadets to adjust to. As a program manager from Mississippi said, "For every choice there is a consequence. In the past their attitude was 'Ain't nothing going to happen.' ChalleNGe may be the first time they have had to deal with, directly and immediately, the consequences of their choices."

The cadets discussed conflict with other cadets, especially those who broke a rule and caused the cadre to dole out a mass punishment, common during the first days of the Residential Phase. They also talked about fights and arguments they had either participated in or witnessed, and how those problems were resolved. The males were more likely to resort to physical displays of anger, while the females were more likely to use words, although not exclusively in either case. Early on, the cadre played an important role in settling conflicts, but as time passed in the cycle, the cadets themselves became more directly responsible for dealing with conflict. Most cadets who were interviewed felt that they had made a few friends in the program, but many said that they had not "come to ChalleNGe to make friends" and thus did not focus on bonding with other cadets beyond what was necessary. While some spoke of a feeling of sisterhood or brotherhood with their squad members, few talked about continuing those relationships after the Residential Phase.

Discipline in ChalleNGe

Discipline is central to the quasi-military model. It should be noted, however, that discipline within ChalleNGe is not viewed as a punishment. The purpose of discipline, according to staff, is to help young people understand that there are consequences for their behavior. They must acknowledge that they have choices and that they themselves can influence the nature of the responses to their behavior. The ultimate goal of discipline is to have young people take responsibility for their own behavior. The disciplinary model employed within ChalleNGe aims to move the cadets from external control to internal control gradually over the course of the cycle. Most of the staff and cadets who were interviewed said that they appreciated the program's disciplinary model.

The cadre, who are on the frontlines of cadet discipline, work from a model that they describe as: "teach, coach, and mentor." Beginning with "teach," initially, during Pre-ChalleNGe and in the early stages of the Residential Phase, there is a high level of external control — cadre and other staff constantly make corrections for any deviation from standard operating procedures and the training mission. Cadre make on-the-spot corrections (sometimes called "30-second interventions") when a candidate or cadet goes wrong, telling them specifically what the problem is and what should have been done, in many cases referring to the cadet

handbook for proper standards of behavior. For example, having a shirt not tucked in would be cause for an on-the-spot correction. A team leader would have the cadet tuck in his shirt, do some push-ups, and then go back to whatever activity the squad was participating in. These types of infractions are not generally documented if the immediate correction is adequate. Cadre reported that it is equally important to acknowledge positive behavior and accomplishments, which teaches the cadets that their behavior — good and bad — results in a tangible benefit or cost.

One cadet reflected on the purpose of this type of discipline, or getting "smoked," as he called it:

> I used to get smoked a lot…before, when I wouldn't listen. I was hardheaded. I didn't listen to nobody. [They'd say] "Get down." [And I would say], "No."…but they're doing it so you could learn.…I learned the hard way.

This cadet ultimately decided to respond to the cadre, asking himself:

> "Hey, you came here for a reason. Why you blowing it? You know? If you leave here, leave [with] something good." So that's why ever since…I've taken advantage of everything I can. Like I'm on the student council; as soon as I heard that, I'm going for it. I never been on student council in my whole life. I seen them…they're good kids on that, you know, and now I'm going for that.

As noted earlier, the use of mass discipline is also common in the early stages of the cycle: If one cadet does something wrong, the entire squad receives the disciplinary action (such as push-ups, running a lap, standing "on the wall," or writing lines). The cadets who were interviewed said that they despised mass discipline. They expressed great frustration over being disciplined because another cadet had failed to follow the rules. As punishment moves from mass to more individually oriented, cadets may receive a physical training (PT)-related consequence (push-ups) or may lose a "liberty" or a privilege, such as allotted phone calls, home passes, or extracurricular activities.[6]

As the cycle continues, the model moves from "teach" to "coach." Over time, cadets begin to assume more leadership responsibility and to discipline themselves and one another, under the close supervision of the cadre and other staff. As discussed further below, cadets rotate through positions leading their squads, platoons, and even, in some cases, the entire company. Ultimately, during the "mentor" stage, cadets are given even more responsibility for

[6]At least one program generally does not use PT in response to infractions. Staff in this program noted that PT is a core component of the program, and they did not want cadets to see it as something negative. Moreover, staff in this program were convinced that assigning push-ups in response to infractions, either in ChalleNGe or in military basic training, was an ineffective means of promoting behavioral change.

themselves and each other. With cadre and other staff guidance, cadets are encouraged to work out solutions to problems. Some cadre interviewed reported that cadets tend to stop themselves in mid-error and change their behavior before a staff person corrects them. The cadets who were interviewed seemed to feel that the discipline meted out in ChalleNGe was "fair."

The programs use somewhat different systems for documenting and responding to relatively severe infractions, such as fighting or insubordination. The cadre receive Crisis Prevention and Intervention training to recognize potential crises and intervene safely and nonviolently. All ChalleNGe programs document both the negative and positive behaviors of cadets. California, for example, uses a Behavior Inventory Card (BIC), in which hole punches are used to document behavior. This card serves as the cadet's ID card, which he or she wears on a lanyard. This allows anyone on the staff to see the current documentation of the cadet's behavior at a glance. In New Mexico, self-correction by the cadet in response to a cadre's instruction is not written up, but infractions that incur consequences are documented by written spot reports (positive or negative). For the most serious infractions, or if spot incidents accumulate, cadet cases go before a disciplinary board. In Mississippi, the cadre issue citations for insubordinate behavior, and a staff member known as "the Judge" determines the appropriate punishment after reviewing the citations. Other programs use disciplinary boards made up of senior staff members to review serious cases and administer sanctions. The highest level of punishment is dismissal from the program, which is used as a last resort and is a Program Director's decision.

Case file reviews of disciplinary issues, educational progress, and general cadet performance are conducted by a staff group called "the Quad," made up of senior staff members from four key areas of the program, including cadre, counselors, instructional staff, and postresidential staff, which includes mentoring. They meet regularly to discuss the performance of all cadets and give special attention to the cases of cadets who are struggling.

The Core Components

The focus of the Residential Phase shifts from primarily training on standard operating procedures (how to meet the program's standards) during Pre-ChalleNGe to teaching the eight core components — the elements that form the foundation of all state ChalleNGe programs. Satisfactory progress on each of the core components is necessary for graduation. As noted in Chapter 1, the eight core components are:

- Leadership/Followership
- Responsible Citizenship
- Service to Community
- Life-Coping Skills

- Physical Fitness
- Health and Hygiene
- Job Skills
- Academic Excellence

Each program staffs the eight components somewhat differently. For example, cadre are usually responsible for Leadership/Followership and Physical Fitness, while counselors often teach Life-Coping Skills and Job Skills, and teachers handle Academic Excellence and Responsible Citizenship. Although a certain type of staff person may be primarily responsible for a certain component, there is also much overlap in terms of who teaches what. For example, in Mississippi, teachers teach the nutrition component of Health and Hygiene, while counselors teach the rest of the component. In many cases, the cadre who were interviewed reported they were involved in teaching all eight core components to one degree or another.

All core components have their own curricula and established criteria to measure knowledge and competency. The competency standards are drawn from the national standard. Cadets must demonstrate 80 percent achievement on competency measures to graduate. Cadets' evaluations on each of the core components are determined by written tests, oral examinations, and observed progress.

In Illinois, the eight core components are taught and evaluated using a self-paced computer course called "Meeting the ChalleNGe." Cadets must pass 80 percent or more of this course at the computer before they are able to graduate. In North Carolina, the core components are evaluated in either a written test or by a "go or no-go" observation. For example, in the Job Skills section, cadets are interviewed on video and evaluated on how they answer questions and conduct themselves (for example, sitting up straight) while being interviewed. Across programs, cadets have the opportunity to be retested until they pass the component before graduation. Progress in each component is tracked in DMARS, the national Web-based management information system.

Cadets who complete all the core components will graduate from ChalleNGe. The graduation ceremony represents the crowning achievement for cadets. They graduate in dress uniforms, and their friends, family, and mentors are invited. The study's researchers were not able to observe graduation, as the research visits took place in mid-cycle. However, in interviews, staff related how significant and emotional these ceremonies are for cadets, their families, and staff.

Leadership/Followership

Some young people who come to ChalleNGe were leaders among their friends at home. However, generally their leadership was not positive or productive, as one cadet in Wisconsin

reported: "I was kind of the leader of us when we did malicious stuff. Most of it was not beneficial to society."

In ChalleNGe, cadets begin to learn followership from day one, as they learn to heed the instructions of cadre, teachers, and other adults. They also begin to learn to follow one another as the cycle goes on, as opportunities arise for individual cadets to lead. At the end of Pre-ChalleNGe, one cadet who shows early leadership ability from each squad is chosen to be a squad leader. A cadet from Illinois talked about the challenges of leading her peers as the first squad leader: "I was the assistant student team leader and a squad leader….People just seem to be so mean to you, because they have to listen to another peer their age and they don't like it. Because they think, 'OK, they're my age, why do I have to listen to them?'" She went on to explain how the staff helped her and her fellow cadets respond to her leadership. "[The] cadre would come and say [to us], 'You know, this is our leadership. It's like answering to us.'" The cadets seemed to understand that peer leadership was an extension of staff leadership and began to respond accordingly over time.

Each cadet gets the opportunity to lead his or her own squad at least once. Based on their performance, some get the opportunity to lead larger groups of cadets as well. Corps Commander is the highest and most coveted leadership position and is awarded toward the end of the Residential Phase. A cadet from Texas talked about her leadership experiences: "Everyone gets leadership responsibility. I'm corps commander, in charge of Alpha, Bravo, and Delta. I am in charge of formations each morning when platoons come out and line up; we tell them the plan for the day. We do lunch menus and get feedback on it. We let drill sergeants do their job and only step in if things are not going well."

The cadre monitor and coach each cadet during their leadership experiences. The cadet's performance is evaluated and logged based on observation and the response of both peers and cadre.

Responsible Citizenship

The Responsible Citizenship core component focuses on cadets' responsibilities as citizens through coursework and activities such as running mock campaigns and legislatures, electing and administering student government bodies, assisting at state legislative functions, and meeting with elected officials. This core component did not resonate much with the cadets who were interviewed. When prompted, they could identify the elements of the citizenship activities that the interviewers listed, and a few reported independently that they intended to vote in upcoming elections. They could talk about their student government structure and activities, and a few cadets said that they were officers in their classes. Although the candidates who were interviewed did not seem to consider this component as especially important, it reinforces the program's general goals of responsibility to self and community.

Service to Community

The Service to Community component of the program connects cadets to organizations that serve the public in the local community and across the state. The description of this activity as "Service to Community" is deliberately different from "community service," which for some cadets has criminal justice overtones. The goal of the activities is to allow cadets to "give back" to the community.

ChalleNGe programs seek out Service to Community partners that meet certain criteria. In Georgia, for example, projects must provide an opportunity for cadets to interact with people in the community and must have public relations value; the community organization must also be able to help the program with tutors and mentors. The program does not accept invitations to use cadets' labor if there is no educational potential.

Examples of service activities in various programs include tutoring in schools and after-school programs, charity fundraisers, visiting the elderly, roadway clean-up, sporting events, disaster preparedness, color guard, parades and fairs, and alcohol and drug awareness events in schools. After Hurricane Katrina, for example, Mississippi cadets assisted with clean-up efforts.

While most cadets who were interviewed were not able to articulate the purpose of these activities beyond the "give back" language used in the program, most seemed to enjoy an opportunity to participate in local community activities, if only because it allowed them to leave the ChalleNGe site for a few hours. A cadet from Georgia was asked about the type and purpose of Service to Community activities his squad had done:

> Oh, we've done a lot. We've picked up trash, we've gone to help volunteer, like the Skyfest [air show], we've gone to the fairs, we've gone to — we built a playground. Did all kinds of stuff. We've helped clean up the community by picking up trash and serving — and we went to the hospital to serve people food. [It is] to build character and help you do stuff for other people — like selfless service, like to help you serve other people instead of just serving yourself.

A cadet from Michigan said:

> I love community service. It gives you a chance to be outside. I'm one of those people who like to do outdoor things; we go rake leaves, or we do work at the golf course, or we went to a zoo — that was really cool. We did an Arthritis Walk…We went to the Detroit marathon; that was pretty awesome. I had been to Detroit, but I had never been to Ford Field before. [It's nice] to take part in things that are going on; and it also catches you up on teaching

> you responsibility. I like community service just because it makes you feel good about yourself, that you can take part in something.

On the bus ride or in the barracks after a Service to Community activity, the cadets discuss with the cadre what they learned from the experience; in some cases, they must write up their thoughts.

Each cadet must complete at least 40 hours of Service to Community activities over the course of the Residential Phase. On average, across programs cadets complete more than twice as many hours as mandated.

Life-Coping Skills

Counselors use daily activities and classes to assist the cadets in their ability to manage anger and stress. Many cadets need help with the anger they feel related to abuse and neglect experienced at home. As a cadet from California explained: "The way I was…I had an anger problem. I used to go to anger management classes from 2 to 4. [When I came to ChalleNGe] I didn't like nobody. When I come here [I thought], I'm going do this on my own. I don't need nobody else." Although he came to the program with the idea that he would deal with his problems on his own, he came to accept the help offered, addressed his anger, and became a leader in his class.

Life-skills instruction also includes money management, household management (which includes keeping barracks clean), parenting, and other skills that are relevant for success later in life, as well as character development instruction (for example, making choices) and education about drug and alcohol use.[7] Most programs also offer Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous groups, as well as other types of individual psychological counseling. As in all the core components, progress is measured through written tests and observational evaluation.

Physical Fitness

Physical activity is a critical component of the program. Throughout Pre-ChalleNGe and the Residential Phase, the program engages participants in intensive physical fitness activities and sports, not only to provide recreation but also to improve their physical conditioning and build team spirit. The cadre use physical activities and training to teach, coach, and mentor. For young people who are accustomed to failure, physical fitness provides a tangible means of showing improvement and developing self-esteem. Staff report that cadets who are

[7]Related to the life-coping skills curriculum are the counseling services the program offers. For those who need it, there is counseling on anger and stress management, counseling for sexual abuse survivors, and group and individual counseling for bereavement.

obese typically lose weight, while others may discover hidden athletic talent or overcome a fear of heights (when completing the high ropes course). With regular testing against the President's Challenge national physical fitness standards, cadets make improvements in each benchmark.

Health and Hygiene

Classes and structured group discussions explore the benefits of proper nutrition and hygiene, as well as the effects of substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. Cadets learn about these subjects, especially nutrition and hygiene, in modules or in coursework and practice in the program. Some programs bring in outside agencies or speakers to teach these subjects.

As noted above, cadets talked about detoxifying from a diet containing a lot of sugar, fat, sodium, and empty calories. In the program they are not allowed junk food, except on select special occasions. Some cadets reported that they were "hungry" and that they needed more food than the program provided, but many of them were overweight when they came to the program and were used to eating what and as much as they wanted. They could acknowledge that in ChalleNGe, they were receiving established "healthy" amounts of food.

In the program, cadets learn how to maintain good personal hygiene, do their own laundry and iron their clothing, and keep their living quarters clean. Cadets are in bed before 10 p.m. in all programs and generally get at least eight hours of sleep. They are not allowed to smoke and, of course, are drug- and alcohol-free while they are in the program.

Job Skills

Each program addresses the Job Skills component somewhat differently. All the programs provide career exploration experiences at some level. Some focus primarily on developing "soft skills," such as interviewing, dressing for interviews, and filling out applications, as well as résumé preparation. There is some emphasis on helping cadets define their future employment interests. Other programs go further to offer some job-specific training.

For example, in Michigan, the local technical center offers seven training courses designed specifically for ChalleNGe cadets. The courses (for example, culinary, welding, auto body, auto mechanics, health, machine tech, and graphic communication) meet in the evenings, three days a week, for 14 weeks. The cadets receive certificates indicating which particular skills they have mastered. This is not a formal certification but is intended to expose the cadets to the occupations and act as a springboard for further training.

The Florida program conducts career and employment scans throughout the state to identify where the best employment options will be in the next three to five years. They then develop career exploration activities in those areas and make them available in a lab setting for

the cadets. Through local partnerships, they provide some elementary certificate programs in areas like health care and computer programming.

Academic Excellence

As noted, the major change in routine from the Pre-ChalleNGe to the Residential Phase is that the cadets begin going to school. Participants must focus on building their academic skills and set individual goals for academic advancement. Most cadets work toward a GED, but some programs offer high school diplomas and/or college credits. For example, in Michigan and New Mexico, cadets who complete the Residential Phase of the program receive credits from a local community college. In Mississippi, cadets who complete a GED and the eight core components receive a state high school diploma. The California program operates as a charter school, so cadets who graduate are awarded a high school diploma.

The programs organize their academic instruction differently. For example, in some programs, instructors teach specific topics, while in others, individual faculty teach all subjects to the same group of students. Some programs arrange the teaching schedule around topics, while others teach each subject throughout the cycle. ChalleNGe staff believe that the program is able to deliver more education in less time than traditional high schools. Michigan's Program Director said, "In half a school year, we give kids two to three years of education. In the 10 years they spend in the public schools, they got maybe five years worth of education."

The classroom curricula vary as well. Across programs, instructors play a role in the development of their own syllabi and seem to be able to organize the instruction in ways they see fit. In some programs, instructors rely on student workbooks, while others conduct much of the GED-related instruction via computer. Still other programs operate much like regular high schools, with lecture- and lab-oriented instruction. In all cases, however, the instruction appears to be interactive: Students are able to receive high levels of personal attention. The relatively small classroom size and the commitment of the instructors facilitate this individualized approach.

For most students, the academic component of ChalleNGe is quite different from what they experienced in their high schools. Cadets welcomed the small class size, tailored instruction, and self-paced approach, and most of those interviewed were responding well — many reporting that they were getting all As or mostly As and Bs in their classes, compared with mostly Ds and Fs previously. Even the students who reported that they were still struggling somewhat with their classes reported positive academic experiences in ChalleNGe. This cadet from Illinois said:

> [In classes] you get what you need to learn. It's fast paced, but then again you have more time, because there's so [few] of you…So I think the GED pro-

> gram is great. They do it, one course at a time. That's just awesome. And also the way they treat you is like people. I thought it was going to be like Juvie, you know, where they treat you like crap all the time. It's not. They treat you like people. That's what I like.

The classroom environment is also different from what most cadets have experienced in high school. Many cadets described high school classrooms that were overcrowded, taught by indifferent teachers, and somewhat chaotic and lacking discipline. A California cadet contrasted the attitudes of teachers in his former high school and those in ChalleNGe:

> "I'm getting my paycheck. If I teach you, I teach you. If you don't want to listen, then hey, I'm not going to try to help you. If you don't want to listen, then why are you here? Why are you wasting my time?" That's how it was. Now it's like, "I can help you. I been reaching out to you. Like, just grab the string. I can help you; I'm going to pull you up. Just don't let go, because I'm going to help you make it to the top."

ChalleNGe classrooms are also notably free of the distractions common in typical high schools. A cadet from Michigan said that he was less distracted by girls in ChalleNGe:

> Back home I'm worried about females. I was like — I was just worried about impressing people. This here, you all wear the same things; females nasty just like you, know what I mean? You get sweaty, they get sweaty. You — I mean, you can't fraternize here. You can't mess with them. So I'm only focused on that one goal. I have one goal…to get the work done.

Both the classroom environment and the cadets' behavior are different in ChalleNGe. This is largely due to the foundation of discipline throughout the program. The program prepares cadets for the classroom experience by training them on proper conduct, including proper dress, addressing others with respect, and following instructions without arguing — and by meting out consequences for failure to follow these rules. Many cadets noted that not talking back, in particular, was difficult for them to do before they came to ChalleNGe.

To reinforce standards of behavior, the cadre remain with the cadets in the classroom (or just outside the door). Their presence tends to quell any latent tendencies to fall back into patterns of insubordination. Cadets who act out in the classroom are removed immediately by cadre and counseled. Thus, instruction can continue for the other cadets, and the cadre can seek a solution to the problem of the individual cadet. One cadet from California distilled the discipline message: "You're in class; you do your work. If you don't, you get *smoked* outside." Instructors who were interviewed reported that the removal of the discipline function from their

duties increases their ability to focus on instruction, meet students' needs, and accomplish curricular program goals.

MDRC's visits took place mid-cycle, when the cadets had just begun GED testing. A few of the cadets who were interviewed had already passed all their GED exams. The vast majority had taken at least a few of the exams and had passed some. Cadets can test and retest in individual GED subjects from mid-cycle onward until they pass. Those who are not able to pass the GED can still graduate from ChalleNGe if they have demonstrated grade-level improvement. The goal of the Academic Excellence component is academic improvement based on TABE scores. It is expected that all cadets will show at least grade-level improvement on their exit TABE tests at the end of the cycle.

The Postresidential Phase

A unique aspect of ChalleNGe relative to other youth programs is the one-year Postresidential Phase. It is comprised of two aspects: placement and mentoring. Preparation for this phase begins during the Residential Phase. A Postresidential Action Plan (P-RAP) is developed; mentors are selected, approved, and trained; and early mentor-mentee contacts are initiated. Because interviews with cadets for this study took place during the Residential Phase, they could not comment on their postresidential experiences. However, they were able to talk about who their mentors were and about their expectations for life after ChalleNGe. In general, there appears to be some variation in the quality of the postresidential component. Most programs reported that they lacked resources to hire adequate numbers of case managers, which affected the quality of their Postresidential Phase. Although all programs implemented mentoring and placement activities, some devoted more staff and resources to this component.

Placement

From the early stages of the Residential Phase, staff (primarily from the counseling and RPM sections) help cadets think about what they will do when they leave the program. The three avenues for placement are education (high school, vocational training, or college), employment, or the military. Because it is a national requirement that a cadet be placed before graduation, the emphasis on placement intensifies toward the end of the Residential Phase. Cadets' placement status is tracked monthly throughout the Postresidential Phase.

The tool for postresidential planning is the Postresidential Action Plan or P-RAP (some programs have customized the name of the tool, for example, as My Action Plan or the Master Action Plan, MAP). The P-RAP is supposed to identify "short, intermediate and long-term realistic goals and the resources required to achieve these goals." The development of the plan is intended to be a "dynamic process that will reflect a series of planned goals/objectives

throughout the Residential and Postresidential Phases to achieve long-term success. The cadet's specific intended placement activity following graduation will reflect or support his or her short-term goal."[8]

The staff who are involved in the development of the P-RAP, including counselors, instructors, and cadre, emphasized the importance of helping cadets set "realistic" goals. This emphasis is part of the "dynamic" process described earlier, in which staff and cadets "negotiate" to come to a set of attainable goals. A cadet from North Carolina talked about the usefulness of his Master Action Plan:

> [In] week three…you start out…you find out what your goals are and you set your goals. And through the weeks, you come back and you start fulfilling those goals and you start making things happen…And then at the end, everything lines up to where you want to be. So it kind of makes it easier to organize, I guess, as far as what you want to do with your life.

Cadets described a variety of aspirations, such as plans to complete high school, attend college, and pursue specific vocations, which ranged from barber, real estate agent, firefighter, actor, and engineer, to careers in the military. In their interviews, many cadets expressed hope for the future, even though they had concerns about returning to the environments from which they came. A cadet from California exemplified this attitude:

> I'm looking forward to my life. Before, I didn't care about my life. I wanted to just do anything. But after this, I want to see how my life's going to turn out. Now that I have a positive mind and know that I [can] accomplish something….

Most cadets said that they felt confident in their ability to apply what they had learned in ChalleNGe and not return to their old ways, as a cadet from Florida noted: "If I get out and keep my mind focused on what I want to do and don't associate with the same crowd, I'll probably be straight."

Placement activities during the Residential Phase extend beyond the development of the P-RAP. The staff use interest and aptitude inventories to help cadets identify reasonable and realistic career pursuits. All cadets are required to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), which is a good comprehensive inventory. Staff (typically counselors or case managers) facilitate applications for each placement type — ASVAB testing for the military, job interviews, and college placement tests. The staff help cadets arrange and get to these exams and interviews. For example, cadets who are interested in working must get to job interviews

[8]National Guard Bureau (2006).

with employers near their homes, and some cadets live hundreds of miles from their ChalleNGe post. Staff may drive cadets to interviews or arrange for an interview to take place when the cadet is at home on a pass. Some programs encourage mentors to take cadets to interviews. Some cadets are unable to arrange in-person interviews and must rely on phone interviews, but staff reported that most jobs available by this route are low paying — for example, fast food restaurants or retail — and not very desirable. Some staff felt that cadets should take these less desirable positions until they returned home and could improve their job search options.

Case managers attempt to keep track of cadets monthly during the postresidential year — calling cadets, mentors, and their immediate and more distant family members to learn whether the cadets are still engaged in an acceptable placement activity. In some programs, the cadre assist the case managers in maintaining contact with cadets in the Postresidential Phase, leveraging their relationships with the cadets to encourage them to stay on track. Nevertheless, many programs have difficulty maintaining this contact with cadets. Some programs reported that this is because they have inadequate staffing for case management. Some staff suggested that the program should give out two diplomas, one for the Residential Phase and one for the Postresidential Phase, in order to keep cadets attached to the program in the year following graduation. Other staff noted that the incentives available in some programs (payment for maintaining employment or other placement activities) seemed to be effective in keeping the cadets on track during the postresidential year.

Mentoring

Another aspect of ChalleNGe that makes it unique relative to other youth programs is the year of mentoring with case management supervision after the Residential Phase. During the Residential Phase, both mentors and cadets receive training about the importance of the mentoring period, the requirements and expectations of the mentoring year, and how best to conduct the relationship.

Mentor Screening

In all programs, cadets and parents nominate mentors. To qualify, prospective mentors must be at least 21 years old, the same gender as the cadet, and live within reasonable geographic proximity. They must not be from the cadet's household or immediate family and cannot be a member of the ChalleNGe staff or a staff member's spouse.

As part of the application process, most programs require applicants to identify two potential mentors. Prospective mentors submit a written application and two references. Although the programs rely on parents and applicants to suggest appropriate mentors, all programs conduct background checks on mentor applicants — screening out those with criminal backgrounds, including those who have a history of sexual abuse, drunk driving, or drug use. After

the checks are complete, the programs usually conduct a telephone interview with the prospective mentors and then choose the one who is best suited for each ChalleNGe participant. A second prospective mentor may be asked to serve as a backup.

Programs attempt to have a mentor prospect for each ChalleNGe participant at the outset of the program, with the match formalized by week 13. Delays in background checks or interviews or incomplete applications can cause setbacks in the process and postpone the match. Additionally, relationships between mentors and cadets can sometimes break down before the end of the Residential Phase, requiring assignment of a new mentor. This can be challenging for the programs. If there is a backup mentor, the program may turn to that person. If not, some programs are able to draw from a small pool of volunteer mentors — people who have been mentors or parents of cadets in previous cycles. The "matching" ceremony includes a joint meeting with the case manager, mentor, and cadet and the signing of a written mentoring agreement.

The Master Cooperative Agreement requires that all mentors receive training, but programs execute this differently. All mentor training materials come from Dare Mighty Things, a firm contracted by the Department of Defense to provide technical assistance and training to ChalleNGe programs. Most programs conduct mentor training on site. Training is scheduled to last for three hours, but staff who have led the training reported "cramming" five hours worth of material into three hours. Some staff are reluctant to ask mentors to come for a day-long training, so they amend the schedule. The training reviews what is expected of a mentor, how the mentoring aspect of ChalleNGe works, how the staff can help the mentor, and information about where mentors can go for additional resources if they need them. If mentors absolutely cannot attend training, they receive the materials (paper and/or video) by mail and are asked to study them. RPM staff may contact them to review the contents of the training program. The Texas program, for example, has piloted a distance learning model using video satellite in remote locations.

Mentor-Mentee Contact

After the matches are complete, cadets and mentors are required to be in contact every week; this contact can take the form of letters, phone calls, or scheduled mentoring visits. A cadet from California talked about her mentor:

> …she's my godmother, but that's my mom's best friend. They've been best friends a long, long time. So she's a good mentor. A really good mentor. Because at first I had a mentor…but she never showed up, so it was like, hey, everybody has a mentor except for me. So we finally found one. Finally found one…and I can trust her. She's reliable to come here. So I was like, "Yay, I have a mentor!" Yep. And she's a great mentor, actually, she's like my best friend too, other than my mom.

A cadet from Mississippi described how he found his mentor:

> Well, we had actually talked for a long time 'cause I was friends with his daughter, and she's a really nice girl. Her whole family are Southern Baptists. They go to church every weekend, every Wednesday. They're a church family. And I talked to her dad several times. I'd go in there and eat lunch with him sometimes when I was at the high school. And I just thought he was a really nice, cool guy. So I asked him if he'd be my mentor when I got all my paperwork in, and he said he would.

The majority of staff reported that mentoring is critical to the success of the program and that it offers the greatest chance to have an impact on cadets in the long term — especially those who have difficult relationships with their parents or guardians and need someone to help them stay on track. Mississippi's mentor coordinator reported that:

> The cadet is more successful at achieving their goals, at maintaining placement, at positive self-image if upon graduation they have an active mentor, active placement, and maintain that throughout. There is no doubt about it.

On the other hand, some staff reported that many cadets and families do not take the assignment of a mentor seriously, resulting in poor matches. Some staff also believed that cadets who break off their mentor relationships early may do so rightly, as they are likely the ones who may need the guidance least.

Cadets are required to have a minimum of four contacts with their mentor per month during the Postresidential Phase, including two face-to-face contacts. The other contacts may be phone calls, e-mails, or letters. Case managers monitor these contacts. They record mentoring progress in a case file, which includes a monthly report from the mentor — either a form or in some cases a preprinted postcard. Some programs are beginning to use e-mail as a means of gathering postresidential contact reports.

Program staff report that it is challenging to get participants and mentors to maintain this contact with their offices throughout the postresidential year, because there are no means to enforce postresidential placement or mentoring activities. Staff in some programs suggested placing a greater emphasis during training of mentors and cadets on their commitment to the mentor-mentee relationship (and reporting on it). Others felt that more resources were needed to effectively carry out long-distance monitoring and support.

Chapter 4

Early Results

It will take several years to fully assess the impacts of ChalleNGe, but very early results provide the first part of the story. This chapter presents two kinds of early data about ChalleNGe. First, it discusses what proportion of the program group participated in the various phases of ChalleNGe, using data from the program's management information system. Second, it presents data from a brief survey administered to program and control group members about nine months after they entered the study — early in the Postresidential Phase for ChalleNGe participants. The survey results show how the program has affected participants' educational attainment and other outcomes early in the study's follow-up period.

Participation, Enrollment, and Graduation

As discussed in Chapter 1, random assignment of ChalleNGe applicants to the program group took place just before the applicants were invited to participate in ChalleNGe. Thus, the program group includes those who completed all phases of ChalleNGe, those who dropped out (or were expelled) before completing it, and those who never showed up to the program at all. In interpreting the results of the study, it is important to consider the extent to which the program group actually experienced the program described in Chapter 3. This is often referred to as understanding the "dosage" of services that sample members received.

In order to examine this issue, MDRC extracted data from DMARS, the national ChalleNGe management information system, for all program group members. Table 4.1 shows data for the residential part of the program, including all 10 study sites.

The left-hand column includes the entire program group and shows that about 80 percent of the program group "registered" for the program. The roughly 20 percent who did not register includes those who were invited but never showed up (perhaps because they changed their minds about participating) and those who showed up for the first day but left immediately, possibly because they failed an initial drug screen.

The left-hand column also shows that 68 percent of the full program group enrolled (that is, completed Pre-ChalleNGe), and 53 percent completed the Residential Phase (graduated).[1]

[1]The term "graduation" is used to refer to completion of the 20-week Residential Phase. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Postresidential Phase is integral to the program model.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4.1

Selected Graduation Data
Program Group Members, All Sites

Outcome (%)	Full Program Group	Among Those Registered	Among Those Enrolled
Registered	82.5	100.0	100.0
Enrolled	67.9	82.3	100.0
Graduated	52.7	63.9	77.7
Sample size = (2,320)	2,320	1,913	1,575

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

The middle and right-hand columns of Table 4.1 show data that may be more familiar to program managers. The middle column shows enrollment and graduation rates among those who showed up and registered. About 82 percent of these youths enrolled (that is, completed Pre-ChalleNGe), and 64 percent graduated from the Residential Phase. These results imply that about 18 percent of those who showed up and registered dropped out during Pre-ChalleNGe, and another 18 percent finished Pre-ChalleNGe but did not complete the Residential Phase.[2]

The right-hand column shows that about 78 percent of those who enrolled (that is, completed Pre-ChalleNGe) graduated from the Residential Phase. This figure is important because ChalleNGe typically reports statistics among youth who enrolled. The 78 percent graduation rate among enrollees in the study sample is almost identical to the national graduation rate during the period when the study was going on, suggesting that the 10 study sites, on average, are fairly representative of the program as a whole.

Figure 4.1 shows that the overall results in Table 4.1 hide substantial variation across the 10 study sites.[3] The top panel of Figure 4.1 shows, for each site, the percentage of the program group that registered for ChalleNGe. The sites are labeled A through J, rather than with

[2]The program's annual report for 2005 notes that, nationally, about 20 percent of those who register typically fail to complete the Pre-ChalleNGe Phase. (See National Guard Bureau, 2005.)

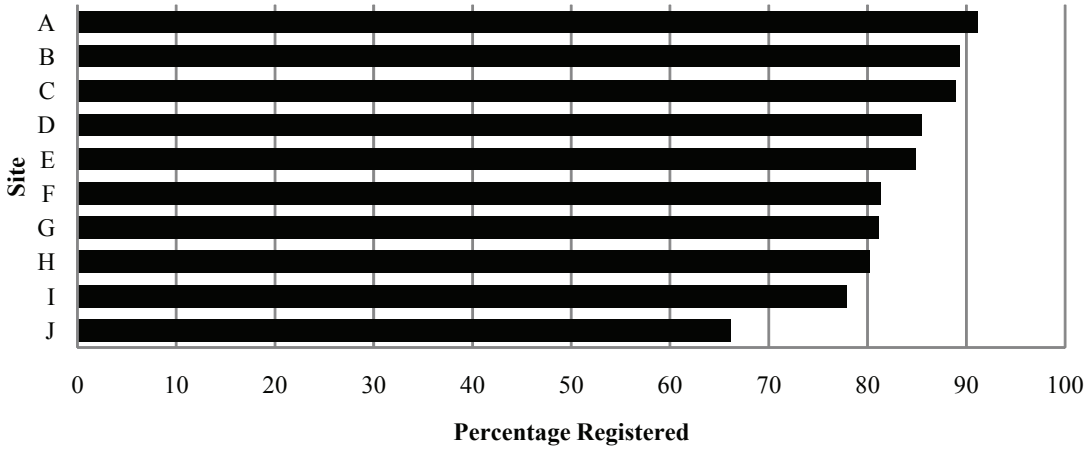
[3]For sites that conducted random assignment more than once, the figures combine results for all the cycles when random assignment took place.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

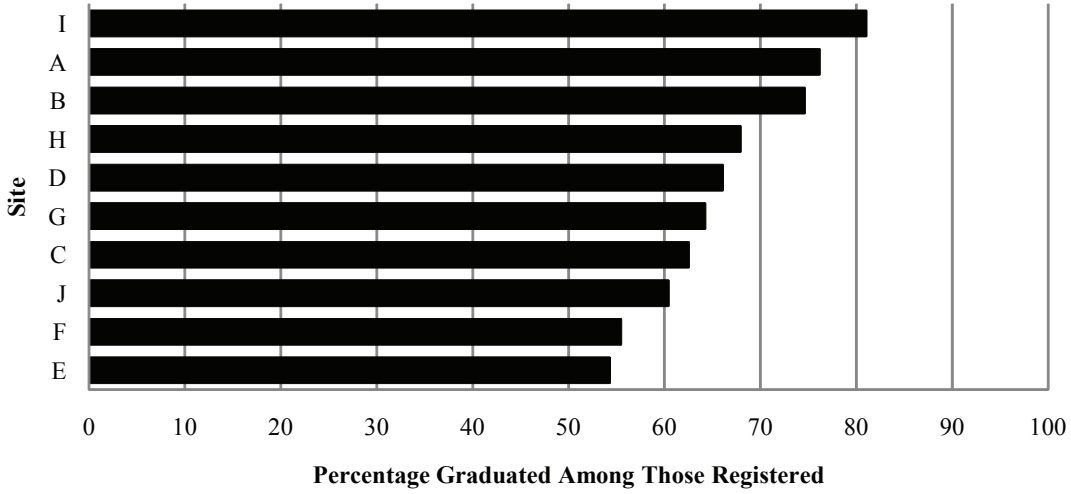
Figure 4.1

Registration and Graduation Data, by Site

Registration Rates for Full Program Group, by Site



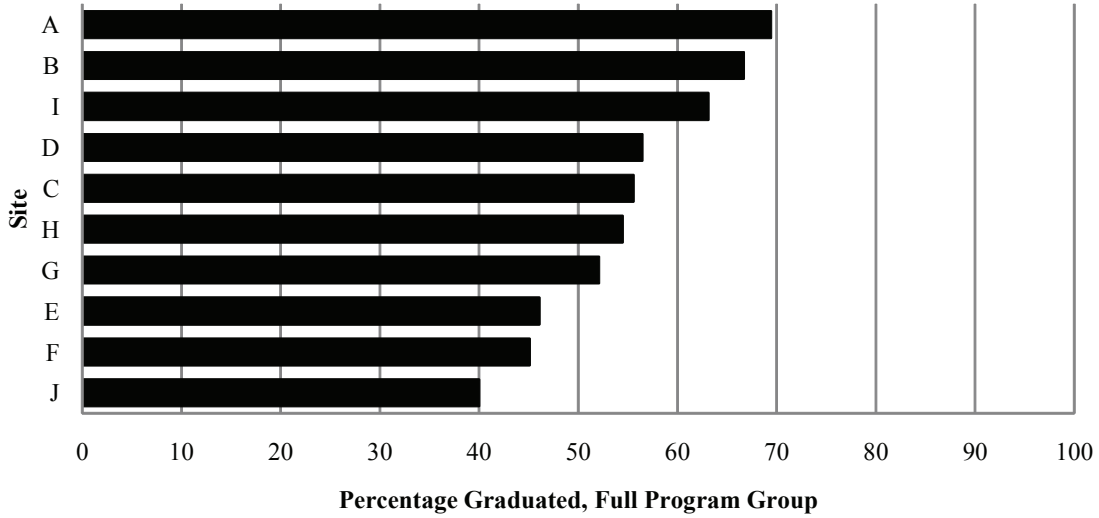
Graduation Rates for Registered Participants, by Site



(continued)

Figure 4.1 (continued)

Graduation Rates for Full Program Group, by Site



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

NOTES: Sample sizes are 2,320 for the full program group, 1,913 for registrations, and 1,575 for enrollees.

their state names, because the point of the figure is to show the variation across sites, not to assess the performance of any specific site.

The top panel of the figure shows that, in some sites (for example, programs A, B, and C), nearly everyone who was invited to ChalleNGe showed up and registered, while in other sites, one-fifth or more of those who were invited never registered. The variation likely reflects differences in the application and screening processes. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, some sites require applicants to complete several steps before they are officially considered for the program. In these sites, applicants who get to the point of being invited almost always show up because they are highly motivated. Other sites have less complex application procedures; they may end up sending invitations to some applicants who are not as strongly committed to the program.

The middle panel of Figure 4.1 shows the graduation rate among those who registered. Again, there is substantial variation, and it is interesting to note that the order of sites is substan-

tially different than in the top panel. For example, in Site C, where almost all the applicants who were invited showed up, there was relatively high attrition during the Residential Phase. Conversely, Site H had one of the lowest show-up rates, but a relatively high graduation rate among those who showed up. The variation in this panel may reflect the different approaches to discipline and retention described in Chapter 3.

The bottom panel of Figure 4.1, derived directly from the first two panels, shows the graduation rate for the full program group, by site. As expected, the sites that ranked relatively high in both the top and middle panels (for example, Sites A and B) rank highest on this measure. Again, however, there is substantial variation across sites. The graduation rate for the full program group ranges from about 70 percent in Site A to about 40 percent in Site J. In later stages of the study, it may be possible to determine whether sites with higher graduation rates achieved larger impacts.

Postresidential Participation

As described in Chapter 3, ChalleNGe Recruitment, Placement, and Mentoring (RPM) staff track cadets and their mentors during the 12-month Postresidential Phase. In each month, staff attempt to determine whether each cadet had an "active" match with his or her mentor — that is, had regular contact — and whether each cadet maintained a "placement," defined as being employed, in school, or in military service.

Table 4.2 shows postresidential placement rates among cadets who graduated from the program. The left-hand column shows that almost all graduates — 93 percent — reported that they were placed (that is, in a job, in school, or in the military) at some point during the Post-residential Phase. The monthly placement rates range from 65 to 70 percent in the early months to about 50 percent at the end of the year.[4] It is important to note that cadets who are not counted as placed may, in fact, have been working, in school, or in the military at the specified point, but did not report their activities to ChalleNGe staff. Employment is the most common type of placement (not shown).

Table 4.3 describes mentor contacts among ChalleNGe graduates. It shows that about 80 percent of graduates had contact with their mentor at some point in the postresidential year, and about three-fourths had at least one in-person contact. The rates of contact decline steadily

[4]Again, there is substantial variation across sites. For example, the placement rate in month 12 ranges from 5 percent to 89 percent. This large disparity may be attributable to differences in sites' abilities to maintain contact with former cadets, rather than to actual differences in cadets' activities. Differences across sites on the survey were not nearly as large. For example, the percentage of cadets who reported working for pay at the time of the interview ranged from 43 percent to 61 percent.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4.2

Postresidential Placement Rates Among ChalleNGe Graduates

Postresidential Month	Placed (%)	Not Placed/No Contact (%)
Months 1-12	92.6	7.4
Month 1	65.8	34.2
Month 3	70.1	29.9
Month 6	61.0	39.0
Month 9	56.5	43.5
Month 12	50.8	49.2
Sample size = 1,223		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

NOTES: Some cadets were listed with the placement code "Miscellaneous." These individuals were counted as "not placed," as they were not working for pay, not in the military, or not in school.

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Table 4.3

Mentor Contacts During the Postresidential Phase, Among ChalleNGe Graduates

Postresidential Month	Any Contact With Mentor (%)	In-Person Contact With Mentor (%)
Months 1-12	80.6	73.7
Month 1	57.7	44.7
Month 3	59.5	42.4
Month 6	48.6	32.3
Month 9	42.2	26.1
Month 12	36.0	21.9
Sample size = 1,223		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

over time. As with the placement rates, however, these data capture only contacts that were reported to the ChalleNGe programs.[5]

Finally, Table 4.4 shows some results from the early survey of sample members, which was administered about nine months after participants entered the study, shortly after ChalleNGe graduates completed the Residential Phase. The bottom three panels of the table show responses for sample members who reported that they had a Postresidential Action Plan.[6] Of this group, more than three-quarters were in touch with their mentor at least somewhat, and about 62 percent reported that they spoke with their mentor by phone weekly or once every two or three weeks. About 57 percent reported that they saw their mentor either weekly or once every two or three weeks, slightly higher than the rates of in-person contact shown in Table 4.3 (suggesting that some programs' tracking difficulties may be causing them to undercount mentor contacts).

Early Impacts of ChalleNGe

As discussed in Chapter 1, the ChalleNGe evaluation is assessing what difference the program makes by tracking and comparing outcomes for a group of young people who were invited to participate in ChalleNGe (the program group) with those of a similar group who were not invited to participate (the control group). Because participants in the study were assigned to one group or the other through a random process, one can be confident that any significant differences that emerge between the groups over time — for example, in educational attainment or employment rates — can be attributed to ChalleNGe. These differences are known as impacts.

In order to obtain some early evidence about the impacts of ChalleNGe, MDRC administered a brief survey to a subset of program and control group members about nine months after they entered the study — early in the Postresidential Phase for ChalleNGe participants. As noted in Chapter 1, just over 1,000 young people from all 10 study sites completed this survey. This section describes some key findings from the survey.

[5]The variation across sites in mentor contact rates is even greater than for placement rates and, similarly, may reflect differences in tracking.

[6]As shown in the top panel of Table 4.4, only 22.6 percent of the program group members who responded to the survey reported that they did not have a Postresidential Action Plan. This figure may seem low because about half the program group did not complete the Residential Phase (see Table 4.1). As expected, very few (4 percent) of the ChalleNGe graduates reported that they had no plan (not shown in the table). Surprisingly, however, about half of those in the program group who did not graduate from ChalleNGe reported that they had a Postresidential Action Plan (not shown in the table). Perhaps the plan was partly complete when they left the program.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4.4

Postresidential Outcomes

Outcome (%)	Program Group
To what extent are you following the Postresidential Action Plan?	
Not at all	6.2
Some	22.5
Mostly	29.3
Completely	19.3
Do not have a plan	22.6
Among those who have a plan	
How realistic do you think the goals in your plan are?	
Very realistic	65.0
Somewhat realistic	29.9
Just a little realistic	4.3
Not at all realistic	0.7
How often do you talk on the phone with your ChalleNGe mentor?	
Once every week	43.0
Once every two or three weeks	18.9
Once every four weeks	8.7
Less than once every four weeks	6.3
Never	22.7
How often do you meet face to face with your ChalleNGe mentor?	
Once every week	37.3
Once every two or three weeks	19.6
Once every four weeks	9.7
Less than once every four weeks	10.4
Never	22.6
Any contact with mentor at least every four weeks?	76.5
Sample size (total = 648)	648

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the nine-month survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, and * = 10 percent.

All numbers have been weighted to account for varying random assignment ratios and sample sizes by site. In general, sites with larger sample sizes are weighted more heavily.

- **At the time of the survey, the program group was much more likely than the control group to have obtained a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certificate (GED).**

Table 4.5 shows some of the survey results, focusing on outcomes related to education, training, and work. The top panel shows the percentage of program and control group members who reported that they had obtained a high school diploma or a GED at the time of the survey. No sample members had a diploma or GED at the point they entered the study, so these credentials must have been earned after random assignment.

The table shows that about 10 percent of the control group had obtained a diploma or (more commonly) a GED since random assignment. These control group members may have enrolled in GED preparation programs — or simply took the test — when they found they could not attend ChalleNGe. In contrast, almost half (46 percent) of the program group had obtained a diploma or a GED. This very large difference — more than 35 percentage points — is statistically significant, meaning that ChalleNGe almost certainly increased the receipt of diplomas/GEDs (that is, the difference between groups is very unlikely to be a statistical fluke). Interestingly, ChalleNGe increased the receipt of both diplomas and GEDs, likely reflecting the fact that some ChalleNGe programs are accredited high schools or can offer high school diplomas to graduates, while others target the GED.[7]

If one assumes that the entire impact of ChalleNGe to date has been driven by the sample members who actually showed up to the program, this would imply that the program increased the proportion of *participants* with a high school diploma or a GED by about 44 percentage points, rather than the 35 percentage-point impact shown in the table.[8] However, it is plausible that ChalleNGe could have affected applicants who never showed up. For example, a parent could have given a young person an ultimatum, forcing him or her to choose between enrolling in ChalleNGe and returning to school, and he or she may have chosen the latter.

- **The program group was more likely than the control group to be working and also more likely to be attending college; members of the control group were more likely to have returned to high school.**

The second panel of Table 4.5 shows sample members' current activities. It is notable that more than one-third of the control group reported that they were currently enrolled in high school. Perhaps some of these control group members were not fully disengaged from high

[7]About half of those in the program group who reported that they had a high school diploma were from the Florida and Georgia sites.

[8]The 44 percentage-point figure is obtained by dividing the 35 percentage-point impact by the percentage of the program group who showed up to the program — about 80 percent.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4.5

Impacts on Education, Training, and Work

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact	
Educational attainment				
Earned high school diploma or GED	45.6	10.1	35.5	***
High school diploma	14.6	2.6	12.0	***
GED	30.9	7.5	23.4	***
Current status				
Currently in				
High school	16.3	35.5	-19.2	***
GED prep	14.8	20.9	-6.1	**
College courses	10.9	2.7	8.2	***
Job training	14.0	10.1	3.9	*
Residential youth program other than ChalleNGe	2.9	1.9	1.0	
Nonresidential youth program	3.1	2.3	0.8	
Any of the above	47.5	58.7	-11.1	***
Currently working	51.2	42.1	9.1	***
Currently working full time[a]	30.5	20.9	9.6	***
Currently working or in any of the above activities	74.4	76.3	-1.9	
Since random assignment				
Ever in				
High school	38.0	56.3	-18.2	***
GED prep	53.6	38.6	15.0	***
College courses	19.8	5.0	14.9	***
Job training	32.7	23.0	9.7	***
Youth residential program other than ChalleNGe	6.0	6.9	-0.9	
Youth nonresidential program	7.8	4.7	3.1	*
Any of the above	83.7	85.3	-1.6	
Ever worked	73.4	70.6	2.8	
Ever worked or participated in any of the above activities	95.4	95.2	0.1	
Sample size (total = 1,018)	648	370		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the nine-month survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, and * = 10 percent.

All numbers have been weighted to account for varying random assignment ratios and sample sizes by site. In general, sites with larger sample sizes are weighted more heavily.

[a]Full-time employment is defined as working 30+ hours per week.

school when they applied for ChalleNGe and chose (or were persuaded by their parents) to return to school when they were not accepted to the program. Of course, there is no way to know how many of the control group members will complete high school, since many are far behind academically. However, it is possible that ChalleNGe could end up encouraging some of them to substitute GEDs for high school diplomas. This will be an important story to follow over time, because some research suggests that a high school diploma is worth more than a GED in the labor market.[9] Interestingly, about 16 percent of the program group were also back in high school.[10]

While members of the control group were more likely to have returned to high school, members of the program group were more likely to be in college or in training and also more likely to be working. For example, 11 percent of the program group reported that they were taking college courses at the time of the survey, compared with 3 percent of the control group. Just over 30 percent of the program group versus 21 percent of the control group reported that they were working full time.

Overall, it appears that about one-fourth of each group were neither working nor engaged in education or training at the time of the survey. It is not clear how long these young people had been "disconnected," however; in the bottom panel, 95 percent of each group reported that they had worked or participated in education or training at some point since they had entered the study.

The rest of the bottom panel, focusing on participation in activities since random assignment, is more difficult to interpret. For the program group, these activities presumably include those provided by ChalleNGe itself, such as GED preparation. It is notable that only about 6 percent of each group reported that they had participated in a residential youth program other than ChalleNGe. This suggests that, at this early point in the follow-up period, few members of the control group have obtained services that look similar to those provided by ChalleNGe.

It is important to note that Table 4.5 includes no data on military enlistment, because it is not clear that the survey firm was able to locate and interview all those who had enlisted. MDRC has requested data on military enlistment from the Department of Defense and hopes to include them in later reports in the study.

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[9]Tyler (2005).

[10]Among members of the program group who graduated from the ChalleNGe Residential Phase, only about 8 percent reported that they were enrolled in high school when they were surveyed. Among members of the program group who did not graduate from ChalleNGe, about 27 percent were in high school when they were surveyed.

- **The program group reported better health and higher levels of self-efficacy and were less likely to have been arrested.**

Table 4.6 shows results for a range of other outcomes. The top panel shows that members of the program group were less likely to have been arrested and convicted and less likely to have spent time "locked up" since the time they entered the study. This is perhaps not surprising, since many of the program group members had been living at a ChalleNGe program site for much of the nine-month follow-up period.

The rest of the table shows that there are few differences between groups in living arrangements but that there are statistically significant differences in several health measures. Among the control group, the percentage who reported very good or excellent health (68 percent) and the percentage who were considered obese based on their body mass index (BMI, 13 percent) were nearly identical to what was reported at the point of random assignment (see Table 2.1). However, in both cases, the program group now appears to be in better health. Seventy-seven percent of the program group reported very good or excellent health, and only 8 percent were obese, according to their BMI (it appears that some members of the program group moved from the "obese" category to the "overweight" category, but there is no difference in the overall average BMI).

Finally, several questions on the survey were combined into a measure of self-efficacy and social adjustment.[11] The responses of the program group were more likely to signal high self-efficacy and much less likely to indicate low self-efficacy (most respondents were in the middle of the scale, somewhere between "high" and "low"). These changes may signal the sort of psychological changes that many experts believe are critical to a successful transition to adulthood.

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It is far too early to draw any conclusions about the long-term effects of ChalleNGe. The survey results presented above do not even reflect the full Postresidential Phase of the program. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, other programs for dropouts have increased GED attainment without producing long-term increases in earnings or other outcomes. Nevertheless, these early results suggest that the ChalleNGe experience has left its participants better positioned to move forward in their transition to adulthood. Later reports will examine whether the educational impacts hold up over time, and whether they lead to improvements in labor market outcomes and other measures of healthy development.

[11]Respondents were asked whether the following statements described them a lot, some, a little, or not at all: "I have learned about setting priorities"; "I have learned about organizing time and not putting things off"; "I have learned about developing different plans for solving a problem"; "I feel I am able to change my community for the better"; "I have learned how my emotions and attitudes affect others"; I have learned how to ask for help when I need it"; and "I have learned how to stand up for something I believe is morally right."

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Table 4.6

Impacts on Other Outcomes

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Impact
Criminal justice			
Arrested since random assignment	14.2	20.0	-5.8 **
Convicted since random assignment	6.5	11.0	-4.4 **
In jail, prison, or detention center since random assignment	10.7	18.9	-8.2 ***
Family/adult support			
Current living situation			
Lives at own home	3.4	4.1	-0.7
Lives at parents' home	74.5	77.5	-3.1
Lives at another person's home	15.1	13.7	1.4
Lives in group quarters	5.7	2.8	2.9 **
Currently homeless	0.3	0.3	0.0
Other living situation	1.0	1.5	-0.5
Adult keeps in touch to make sure you are OK	96.7	97.2	-0.5
Family and friends extremely/quite a bit supportive of goals	88.9	86.7	2.3
Health			
Self-rating of overall health very good or excellent	76.7	68.3	8.4 ***
Body mass index (BMI)[a]	24.2	24.3	-0.1
Overweight[b]	25.3	21.1	4.2
Obese[b]	8.4	12.8	-4.3 **
Self-efficacy and social adjustment scale[c]			
High	11.0	7.0	4.0 **
Low	10.7	20.3	-9.6 ***
Sample size (total = 1,018)	648	370	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from responses to the nine-month survey.

NOTES: Estimates are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for sample member characteristics. Significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent, ** = 5 percent, and * = 10 percent. All numbers have been weighted to account for varying random assignment ratios and sample sizes by site. In general, sites with larger sample sizes are weighted more heavily.

[a]Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared.

[b]Overweight is defined as a BMI between 25 and 29; obesity is defined as BMI of 30 or more.

[c]Scale is created from seven survey questions regarding self-efficacy and social adjustment, as rated on a four-point scale. High/low designations represent one standard deviation above or below the mean.

Appendix A

Supplemental Tables

National Guard ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table A.1

Selected Characteristics of ChalleNGe Sample Members at the Time of Random Assignment, Full Sample, by Site

Characteristic	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Gender (%)											
Male	84.1	100.0	79.1	80.9	75.5	92.4	80.2	100.0	100.0	86.8	84.4
Female	15.9	0.0	20.9	19.1	24.5	7.6	19.8	0.0	0.0	13.2	15.6
Average age (years)	17.3	17.2	17.2	17.3	17.3	17.2	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.3	17.2
Race/ethnicity[a] (%)											
Hispanic	14.4	56.6	13.3	3.4	17.6	4.4	0.8	5.1	60.0	34.4	6.5
White	41.3	29.5	45.5	24.5	27.7	68.9	59.0	34.7	16.7	47.1	74.0
Black	40.1	7.8	37.0	68.7	52.4	20.5	37.4	54.8	2.2	16.9	8.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.4	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	3.2
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	2.0	15.6	0.0	1.9
Other	0.3	0.8	0.9	1.3	0.4	1.2	0.3	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.0
Multiracial	2.7	4.7	2.8	1.9	1.5	4.7	2.3	3.1	3.3	1.6	5.8
U.S. citizen (%)	99.1	98.5	98.1	99.7	98.8	99.7	99.7	98.3	100.0	98.9	99.4
Born in U.S. (%)	97.3	95.4	96.2	97.2	97.8	98.2	99.2	95.6	97.8	96.3	96.1
Speaks a non-English language at home (%)	12.6	32.8	10.0	8.1	16.7	4.7	2.3	6.5	40.7	22.0	9.9
Has children (%)	2.5	0.0	2.4	3.4	2.9	2.1	1.3	1.7	5.5	4.9	1.3
Lives at a parent's home (%)	88.8	89.8	91.0	88.6	89.0	90.3	86.8	87.3	83.5	88.9	92.1
Parent's housing situation, among those living at a parent's home											
Own	59.6	62.7	63.8	55.7	49.1	77.0	67.9	58.5	51.4	66.0	62.8
Rent	34.8	31.8	32.4	37.6	46.3	18.7	24.8	35.6	36.5	28.4	32.1
Don't know	2.8	4.5	1.6	4.4	2.6	2.0	3.1	2.4	6.8	2.5	1.5
Other	2.7	0.9	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.3	4.3	3.6	5.4	3.1	3.6
Lives in a two-parent household[b] (%)	45.5	56.9	52.9	43.4	39.0	55.4	48.7	39.5	40.7	47.6	51.0
Usually feels safe in neighborhood (%)	92.3	85.2	95.2	97.2	87.2	95.3	95.0	95.2	95.6	91.5	96.1

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Has ever been in foster care (%)	8.1	8.5	7.1	5.3	8.5	7.4	6.7	9.5	14.3	6.9	12.3
Is currently in foster care (%)	1.0	2.3	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.3	1.4	2.2	0.0	2.6
Anyone in household receives public assistance (%)	29.5	22.7	14.6	25.3	39.6	19.0	30.5	27.8	46.1	23.0	25.5
Highest grade completed (%)											
8th grade or lower	14.2	0.8	19.0	11.4	10.6	10.1	22.0	27.8	13.3	14.5	10.8
9th grade	31.4	13.8	35.6	40.5	25.5	33.9	33.8	35.9	32.2	38.2	28.4
10th grade	38.2	48.5	35.1	38.0	43.2	42.3	31.4	27.8	33.3	32.8	41.9
11th grade	15.6	35.4	10.2	9.5	19.8	13.4	11.8	8.5	21.1	14.5	18.2
12th grade	0.6	1.5	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.3	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7
Usual grades received in school (%)											
Mostly As and Bs	4.0	0.0	9.2	5.8	3.0	2.1	5.6	1.7	10.2	6.5	1.3
Mostly Bs and Cs	17.2	15.9	24.2	30.5	12.8	10.1	24.3	11.5	21.6	22.7	7.8
Mostly Cs and Ds	39.5	41.3	42.0	44.7	34.6	34.6	47.5	38.2	42.0	47.0	35.3
Mostly Ds and Fs	48.7	55.6	39.1	28.6	57.3	58.8	34.9	57.6	34.1	35.7	64.1
Has a learning disability (%)	27.8	31.5	24.3	17.6	22.8	41.8	24.7	35.7	32.6	30.5	35.8
Has/had Individual Education Plan (IEP) (%)	30.4	31.3	30.8	21.0	28.6	38.7	23.2	40.0	34.1	26.1	44.4
Ever suspended from school (%)	82.3	74.2	77.7	84.1	84.3	88.4	71.9	92.8	84.4	75.3	80.5
Times suspended in the past year, among those suspended (%)											
Once	22.7	27.0	22.7	23.1	22.8	21.4	26.4	18.2	26.1	22.7	17.1
2-3 times	28.4	22.2	24.6	31.9	29.4	30.3	22.1	35.0	30.7	27.0	25.0
4 or more times	20.1	11.9	16.1	19.2	23.1	26.0	11.2	28.3	9.1	13.0	26.3
Never	28.8	38.9	36.5	25.7	24.8	22.3	40.3	18.5	34.1	37.3	31.6
Ever arrested (%)	31.1	17.3	33.2	26.9	32.9	28.2	20.5	31.5	62.1	33.9	48.0
Ever convicted (%)	16.3	10.3	9.6	16.6	12.7	20.5	9.9	17.9	39.8	21.3	37.0

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Ever had full-time job (%)	12.4	3.1	14.8	11.1	11.0	10.6	18.4	10.4	32.2	11.2	11.0
Who first suggested you should apply for ChalleNGe? (%)											
Yourself	28.0	18.5	21.8	29.3	31.5	27.1	41.3	16.3	19.1	20.6	25.0
A relative	47.9	53.8	56.9	44.9	50.8	51.5	45.5	42.0	27.0	44.4	44.1
A school official	13.7	20.0	15.6	16.9	9.9	8.2	7.0	28.8	5.6	19.0	20.4
The justice system	6.3	0.8	1.9	10.5	2.9	7.1	3.6	8.1	39.3	12.2	3.3
Looked into other programs like ChalleNGe (%)	25.0	22.2	26.5	28.7	27.1	18.1	18.9	35.1	25.8	21.5	26.7
Interested in ChalleNGe in order to join military (%)	30.7	34.6	34.1	31.7	25.5	39.4	35.0	35.8	41.3	34.2	35.7
Overall health very good or excellent (%)	66.0	70.5	72.0	76.4	58.3	69.3	72.9	72.9	50.0	59.4	58.6
In past 30 days, how often did you feel…? (1=Never, 5=Always)											
Nervous	1.9	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.1	1.9	1.7	2.2	2.0	2.0
Hopeless	1.8	2.1	1.9	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.9	1.6
Restless or fidgety	2.2	2.3	2.0	1.8	2.2	2.5	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.1
So depressed that nothing could cheer you up	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.5
Everything was an effort	2.2	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.1
Worthless	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.8	1.6
Taking any medication (%)	20.8	21.4	19.6	14.4	17.2	30.9	22.7	19.7	19.5	25.3	27.2
Taking Attention Deficit Disorder medication	9.6	10.4	8.1	5.9	6.4	18.8	9.4	9.8	5.7	14.1	15.9
Taking depression medication	5.7	5.6	6.2	2.5	3.9	8.9	6.5	5.7	5.7	10.8	7.3
Taking smoking cessation medication	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.3
Taking asthma medication	5.2	7.2	2.4	4.1	6.2	7.4	3.4	5.7	9.1	2.7	2.0
Taking other medication	6.3	6.4	8.1	4.1	5.2	8.6	8.6	4.1	6.8	8.1	7.3
Average body mass index (BMI)[c]	24.1	23.6	24.5	23.6	24.4	23.9	24.3	24.0	24.0	24.4	23.7
Overweight, BMI[c] 25-29 (%)	20.8	22.5	19.3	19.2	20.9	19.1	21.6	23.5	19.5	21.1	22.0
Obese, BMI[c] 30+ (%)	11.8	9.2	15.5	9.2	13.5	10.2	12.8	8.4	13.4	15.1	6.8

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Smoke cigarettes how often? (%)											
Never/rarely	67.3	90.5	76.6	78.8	69.9	58.7	65.4	56.5	54.0	62.2	52.1
One pack per week or less	16.5	4.0	12.0	12.9	16.1	19.2	13.9	26.9	25.3	15.6	20.5
2-6 packs per week	9.6	4.0	6.7	5.1	8.4	14.7	10.5	9.2	9.2	13.3	19.2
One pack per day or more	6.6	1.6	4.8	3.2	5.6	7.5	10.2	7.4	11.5	8.9	8.2
Ever drink alcohol or use drugs (%)	36.2	40.9	30.9	22.6	37.7	43.3	25.2	29.9	66.7	51.1	47.3
Felt need to cut down	26.4	28.8	21.9	17.5	28.8	30.7	18.8	21.9	52.4	34.3	28.7
Annoyed by complaints about your drug/alcohol use	15.6	20.8	11.5	9.8	16.6	17.5	10.0	13.0	35.7	26.0	13.3
Felt guilty about alcohol/drug use	20.3	22.0	17.9	14.6	20.8	23.5	14.6	17.1	40.5	27.4	25.4
Drink or use drugs in the morning	4.7	8.1	2.5	1.9	4.6	6.6	1.1	3.4	16.7	9.1	7.0
Average agreement (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)											
Goals in life are becoming clearer	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.4	3.0	3.2	3.0	3.1
Clear sense of beliefs and values	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.2
Sense of life path, steps to get there	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1
Can envision the person you want to become	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.4
Life filled with meaning and purpose	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.2	2.9	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.1
Highest education level obtained by mother (%)											
Not a high school graduate	15.6	24.8	12.0	10.7	18.2	9.7	16.6	10.9	20.7	19.1	20.3
HS diploma or GED	32.5	17.4	29.0	39.4	33.6	33.8	33.2	28.2	35.4	31.7	31.2
Some college, no degree	30.0	27.3	31.5	29.6	31.1	33.2	25.7	33.1	28.0	28.4	24.6
College degree	22.0	30.6	27.5	20.2	17.2	23.3	24.6	27.8	15.9	20.8	23.9

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

	All Sites	CA	FL	GA	IL	MI	MS	NC	NM	TX	WI
Highest education level obtained by father (%)											
Not a high school graduate	22.0	27.1	16.3	19.6	24.3	13.9	25.1	24.6	27.4	19.7	23.1
HS diploma or GED	41.0	26.2	35.9	42.8	43.9	38.4	40.1	43.4	43.5	38.2	46.3
Some college, no degree	20.9	25.2	22.3	22.1	19.2	29.3	21.1	14.8	11.3	22.9	17.4
College degree	16.1	21.5	25.5	15.5	12.7	18.4	13.7	17.2	17.7	19.1	13.2
Mother's employment status (%)											
Works full time	61.9	61.0	65.7	66.1	58.3	64.1	58.7	67.5	57.0	61.6	65.9
Works part time	11.9	12.2	14.9	11.0	12.3	14.4	10.6	10.0	12.8	9.6	11.6
Not currently working	19.4	22.0	11.9	14.8	22.5	17.5	22.0	16.4	25.6	19.8	16.7
Other	6.8	4.9	7.5	8.1	6.9	4.1	8.7	6.1	4.7	9.0	5.8
Father's employment status (%)											
Works full time	72.2	79.4	83.4	72.8	65.2	73.6	75.3	71.6	70.5	74.3	78.0
Works part time	3.3	2.9	3.7	4.2	3.6	3.5	2.8	2.2	1.6	4.7	2.4
Not currently working	10.1	3.9	6.1	8.4	15.0	9.2	7.6	8.6	13.1	6.8	10.2
Other	14.3	13.7	6.7	14.6	16.2	13.7	14.2	17.7	14.8	14.2	9.4
Sample size	3,074	130	211	325	941	343	389	299	92	190	154

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used all available data for ChalleNGe sample members who completed a BIF.
Data for the "All Sites" column represent an average of all 3,074 sample members.
Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.
Distributions may not add to 100 percent where categories are not mutually exclusive.
[a]Race/ethnicity categories were constructed by counting as Hispanic those who checked both Hispanic and black or white. None of these sample members are counted as multiracial.
[b]A two-parent household was defined as containing two biological and/or stepparents.
[c]Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both adult men and women. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight by his or her height squared.

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program

Appendix Table A.2

Graduation Rates by Site for Selected Class Cycles

Program	Graduated Among Registered (%)	Graduated Among Enrolled (%)
CA 2005-1	67.2	83.5
CA 2005-2	61.8	81.7
CA 2006-1	**66.5**	**77.9**
CA 2006-2	63.4	85.6
CA 2007-1	68.3	89.8
GA 2005-1	66.5	79.6
GA 2005-2	**68.3**	**79.3**
GA 2006-1	**74.1**	**80.3**
GA 2006-2	71.0	79.3
GA 2007-1	60.1	73.6
FL 2005-1	84.9	87.0
FL 2005-2	**83.8**	**88.1**
FL 2006-1	**78.1**	**80.5**
FL 2006-2	79.6	83.8
FL2007-1	66.1	76.2
IL 2005-1	53.1	84.2
IL 2005-2	**56.3**	**72.7**
IL 2006-1	**51.3**	**77.3**
IL 2006-2	46.5	75.2
IL 2007-1	59.2	81.7
MI 2005-1	**65.9**	**75.7**
MI 2005-2	**56.1**	**61.2**
MI 2006-1	**57.8**	**80.9**
MI 2006-2	66.4	82.2
MI 2007-1	56.8	81.4
MS 2005-1	66.4	74.9
MS 2005-2	60.5	71.8
MS 2006-1	**75.1**	**80.2**
MS 2006-2	**65.7**	**71.8**
MS 2007-1	75.7	85.6
NC 2005-1	62.9	79.6
NC 2005-2	**60.3**	**73.1**
NC 2006-1	**61.2**	**83.8**
NC 2006-2	63.6	80.2
NC 2007-1	70.5	83.0
NM 2005-1	84.1	84.1
NM 2005-2	66.7	83.5
NM 2006-1	**74.2**	**87.5**
NM 2006-2	58.5	77.5
NM 2007-1	59.0	84.9

(continued)

Appendix Table A.2 (continued)

Program	Graduated Among Registered (%)	Graduated Among Enrolled (%)
TX 2005-1	61.1	79.1
TX 2005-2	**48.1**	**57.5**
TX 2006-1	**68.1**	**77.0**
TX 2006-2	61.6	69.1
TX 2007-1	62.8	80.5
WI 2005-1	60.4	81.1
WI 2005-2	64.4	76.8
WI 2006-1	**66.0**	**82.4**
WI 2006-2	60.7	74.7
WI 2007-1	69.5	84.7
Average in cycles with random assignment	**65.4**	**77.1**
Average in cycles without random assignment	65.0	80.5

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the ChalleNGe Data Management and Reporting System (DMARS).

NOTES: Classes shown in bold are those in which random assignment was conducted.

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About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Child Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.