



COLLABORATION, UNDERSTANDING, AND SUPPORT

**The Innovative Employment Solutions
Program and a New Approach to
Workforce Development for People
Affected by the Justice System**

Douglas Phillips
Gabriel Weinberger
Michelle Manno

June 2025

mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

Collaboration, Understanding, and Support

The Innovative Employment Solutions Program
and a New Approach to Workforce Development
for People Affected by the Justice System

Douglas Phillips, Gabriel Weinberger, and Michelle Manno

JUNE 2025



FUNDERS

This paper and the project for which it was developed were funded by the Reentry Division of the Los Angeles County Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD). Before November 2022, when JCOD was established by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Reentry Division and its programs and staff were housed within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services' Office of Diversion and Reentry.

The following organizations support dissemination of MDRC publications and our efforts to communicate with policymakers, practitioners, and others: Arnold Ventures, Ascendium Education Group, Yield Giving/Mackenzie Scott, and earnings from the MDRC Endowment. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

Copyright © 2025 by MDRC®. All rights reserved.

OVERVIEW

Evidence shows that employment can help keep people on parole or probation from coming back in contact with the justice system. But people who have a history of such involvement may lack educational credentials or have little work history, and must contend with employers' bias against hiring them. Furthermore, they may require additional support—such as housing or transportation—to be ready to handle the demands of employment.

The Los Angeles County Innovative Employment Solutions Program (INVEST), established in February 2018, is designed to address the range of employment and supportive-service needs people on probation may have and support them in pursuing their employment and career goals. It operates at selected career centers in Los Angeles County. The program combines features of traditional workforce programs with some additional components. Most notably, it offers intensive training to prepare staff members to work with people on probation, collaboration between probation officers and employment staff members who work together in the same space, and additional funding for supportive services.

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the INVEST program, which consisted of an implementation study and an outcomes study. The implementation study finds that the INVEST program is being implemented as intended, making a variety of employment services and training and educational opportunities available to clients, along with supportive services. It also finds that clients do not always take advantage of program services. The program services most frequently used are those related to finding employment quickly and services that take place as part of enrollment or very soon thereafter. Only about one-third of INVEST clients enrolled in any type of training program, and fewer than half of INVEST clients received any type of supportive service. This pattern suggests that people receiving services from INVEST need income from employment quickly, and may need financial support to be able to participate in education or training.

The outcomes study tracks employment and earnings for 1,232 INVEST clients who enrolled between March 1, 2018, and February 28, 2021, and compares their results with those of a group who were referred to INVEST but did not enroll. People who enrolled in INVEST had higher employment rates (by 12 percentage points) and higher earnings (by \$1,931) over the course of a follow-up year (beginning about a year after enrollment and ending about two years after enrollment). This difference overwhelmingly reflects results among one subgroup of individuals who did not have any reported earnings when they enrolled. However, the comparison group for this part of the study was not constructed rigorously, so it is difficult to say with any confidence that the INVEST program is the reason for these improvements.

It was also not possible to construct a rigorous comparison group for outcomes related to involvement in the legal system. Compared with a similar group in another MDRC study in Los Angeles County, INVEST clients were less likely to be involved in the legal system in the year after enrolling. About three-quarters of INVEST clients avoided any arrest during that year.

Future research using a more rigorous study design—that was able to draw on more comprehensive data—could help to determine the program's impacts on employment, earnings, and involvement in the criminal legal system, and to identify whom the program helps most.

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	iii
LIST OF EXHIBITS	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction	1
INVEST Funding	3
The INVEST Model	4
2 INVEST Study Design	7
3 INVEST Program Implementation	9
Implementation of Program Services	9
INVEST Clients	12
Program Recruitment and Enrollment	15
Client Service Use	17
Program Satisfaction	22
Program Implementation Summary	22
4 Comparing INVEST Program Employment Outcomes with a Comparison Group	23
Study Sample and Data in the Employment Analysis	23
Analysis of Employment Outcomes	25
Limitations and Interpretations of Results	27
5 INVEST Program Criminal Legal Outcomes	29
6 Conclusions	33
Future Directions	34
APPENDIX	
A Supplementary Tables	35
B Analysis Data and Methods	39
REFERENCES	49
EARLIER MDRC PUBLICATIONS ON THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY REENTRY INTEGRATED SERVICES PROJECT	50

LIST OF EXHIBITS

TABLE

3.1	Demographic Characteristics of INVEST Clients, by Type of Probation	13
3.2	Recent Criminal Legal System Involvement of INVEST Clients at the Time of Referral to the Program	14
3.3	Client Use of INVEST Services	18
5.1	Criminal Legal System Outcomes in the Year After Enrollment in INVEST, by Type of Probation	30
5.2	Involvement in the Criminal Legal System Among INVEST Participants and the DOORS Study Comparison Group	32
A.1	INVEST Locations	37
A.3	Involvement of INVEST Clients in the Criminal Legal System from Two to Five Years Before Enrollment, by Type of Probation	37
B.1	Sample Size in the Employment Analysis and All Exclusions Made Due to Data Considerations	43
B.2	Characteristics of INVEST Participants and Comparison Group Members Included in the Employment Analysis	45
B.3	Regression-Adjusted Differences in Employment Outcomes, by Reported Earnings	48

FIGURE

4.1	Employment Data Time Periods Relative to Program Referral	24
4.2	Average Earnings and Employment Rates Over Time, Among INVEST Participants and the Comparison Group	26
A.1	Monthly Referrals to INVEST	38

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Los Angeles County Innovative Employment Solutions Project (INVEST) was designed in partnership with the Los Angeles County Probation Department; the Reentry Division within the Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry); and the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). The program is currently overseen by DEO and the Probation Department. We are thankful to many individuals in these offices for their involvement in the facilitation of the research and for their review and comments on this report. Specifically, we thank Katherine Vacanti, Whitney Moore White, Kimberly Foley, Irene Pelayo, Cheren Payne, Vanessa Martin, Laurence Martin, Aurielle Hall, and Tommy Baines. The authors also thank Jose Rivas, Carrie Cui, and Suren Gyurgchyan with DEO, who provided an incredible amount of support with data acquisition. We are also grateful for the support of the Chief Information Office in Los Angeles County and its assistance with data acquisition, with special thanks to Chun Liu, Ricardo Basurta, Irene Vidyanti, and Max Stevens.

The authors would like to express our gratitude to the dedicated staff members in the America's Job Centers of California and the Los Angeles County Probation Department participating in the INVEST program. We are greatly indebted to those who have unwaveringly supported INVEST participants and agreed to be interviewed for our research in advance of this report, and without whom this report would not be possible. Thank you to the INVEST clients who spoke with our interview team in Los Angeles and virtually. Your voices are invaluable to the research, and we sincerely appreciate your contributions.

We appreciate the many other MDRC staff members who played a role in the research that made this report possible. Sophie Shanshory, Jonny Poilpré, and Ann Bickerton conducted qualitative interviews. Megan Schwartz, Anna Kyler, and Bret Barden contributed to data collection and analysis. Sarah Picard, Charles Michalopoulos, Daron Holman, and Alyson Metzger reviewed the report. Jose Morales and Madelyne Lynam provided coordination support and fact-checking, Joshua Malbin edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared the report for publication.

The Authors

1

Introduction

Across the United States, one-stop career centers known as America’s Job Centers provide many forms of employment-related assistance to job seekers and employers, using funding provided by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. In California, these one-stop centers are known as America’s Job Centers of California (AJCC). Basic workforce services available to anyone entering an AJCC include skills and interest assessments, résumé development, job search assistance, interview training, and other workforce-preparation services. Individual services available to job seekers who meet WIOA eligibility requirements include employment-readiness programs such as soft-skills and job-skills workshops and training, on-the-job training opportunities, connections to educational opportunities (for example, high school equivalency preparation or an associate’s degree program), and services and funding to help people achieve program goals, such as transportation assistance, books, exam fees, work clothes, tools, or other eligible items necessary for a training program or a job. AJCCs often offer specialized workforce services to address the particular needs of certain groups of job seekers, such as veterans, young people, or people with disabilities, which require staff members to receive specific training.

Historically, while Los Angeles County’s AJCCs serve job seekers with a history of involvement in the criminal legal system, AJCCs have not offered specialized services or trained staff members to understand and meet their specific needs. For this group, finding and retaining employment is often one of many challenges they must deal with. The challenges are especially acute for people who were recently released from jail or prison, often to community supervision (such as probation or parole), or who must serve a probation sentence in lieu of incarceration.¹ Evidence shows that employment can help keep people from becoming involved in the criminal legal system in the future. But people who have a history of such involvement may lack educational credentials or have little work history, and must contend with employers’ bias against hiring them. Furthermore, they may require additional support — such as housing, transportation, medical or behavioral health attention, or education — to be ready

1. Probation, or probationary supervision, is “a judicially imposed suspension of sentence and a form of community supervision... [used] in lieu of a long-term jail or prison sentence.” Fraser (2017).

to handle the demands of employment, and traditional workforce-development programs may not be equipped to provide that support.²

The Los Angeles County Innovative Employment Solutions Program (INVEST), established in February 2018, is designed to address the range of employment and supportive-service needs people on probation may have and assist them in pursuing their employment and career goals at selected AJCCs in Los Angeles County. The program takes an innovative approach that combines the features of traditional workforce programs with some additional components, available exclusively for INVEST clients and designed to meet the needs of people on probation. To provide that combination, the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) and the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) partnered with the Reentry Division within the Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry.³

The program model emphasizes the importance of preparing staff members to understand the needs and challenges of people on probation and improves coordination between probation officers and employment-focused staff members, while at the same time using a flexible spending approach to supportive services that allows them to be provided more comprehensively. The program aims to improve employment and earnings outcomes for clients, which may reduce their likelihood of future contact with the criminal legal system.

Before INVEST was launched, Los Angeles County AJCCs, Probation, and other county departments and community-based service providers did not coordinate well in offering workforce-development services to people who had been involved in the legal system. AJCC staff members did not have specialized training for working with people on probation, so were not prepared to address their needs. Furthermore, probation officers did not have training in employment services. As one program leader explained, “[INVEST] is serving a specific population, people in adult felony probation.... I’ve always viewed [INVEST] as an opportunity to really educate and immerse the work into the public workforce system. Really train the public workforce system to work with a population who has historically been underserved, and quite frankly, forgotten by the workforce system.” INVEST was designed to address the shortcomings of these unaligned systems and improve employment services for people

2. Nally, Lockwood, Ho, and Knutson (2014); Widra and Jones (2023).

3. The economic and workforce-development branch of the Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services (WDACS) was one of the primary partners for INVEST at its launch in 2018. In July 2022, WDACS dissolved into several independent departments. Its economic and workforce-development branch became the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), which remains involved in the implementation and oversight of INVEST. The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services’ Office of Diversion and Reentry was another primary partner; INVEST program funding initially flowed from this office. In 2022, the LA County Board of Supervisors centralized preexisting justice-reform efforts in Los Angeles County, including pretrial and reentry services as well as jail-closure work (with an emphasis on the nonclinical components of the work) by establishing the Justice, Care, and Opportunities Department (JCOD). The original Reentry Division within the Office of Diversion and Reentry transferred as an entire unit (that is, all its contracts, programs, funding, and staff members) to JCOD in November 2022.

involved in the legal system, with the goal of keeping them from coming back into contact with that system.

MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization, was engaged to evaluate INVEST. This evaluation represents one of six programs being evaluated in Los Angeles County as part of the Los Angeles County Reentry Integrated Services Project; all the programs being evaluated in the project aim to address the needs of people who have been involved in the criminal legal system.⁴ The project aims to assess the implementation and effects of JCOD programs on its participants and to make recommendations that will strengthen services for people who have been involved in the criminal legal system, including those on adult felony probation and those with mild or moderate mental health or substance use disorders.

The research team conducted a study of how INVEST is being implemented and what services its participants are using, along with a study of participants' outcomes related to employment, earnings, and involvement in the criminal legal system. The rest of this report describes the INVEST program, the implementation study findings, and the outcomes study findings. The final chapter of the report offers recommendations for local, state, and national policymakers and for additional research.

INVEST FUNDING

INVEST is funded by the California Community Corrections Performance Initiative Act (Senate Bill 678, or SB 678). To reduce prison overcrowding and save money on prison costs, in 2009 the State of California passed SB 678, which, among other strategies, provides counties with financial incentives to develop policies, programs, and services to reduce the number of adults on probation following felony convictions who are committed to state prison.⁵ State savings generated by reductions in incarceration are shared with counties to support these programs. The Los Angeles County Probation Department, which is the largest probation agency in the United States, received an allocation of fiscal incentives from the state, which it used to fund programs and services that aim to reduce the likelihood of adults on probation returning to state prison. DEO, the Reentry Division, and LA County Probation used these funds and drew on resources available through the county's existing AJCCs to create INVEST.

4. More information on this project, including reports and findings from other evaluations, can be found at <https://www.mdrc.org/work/projects/los-angeles-county-reentry-integrated-services-project>.

5. Fraser (2017).

THE INVEST MODEL

INVEST pairs traditional workforce services with specialized services to help people on probation overcome the barriers they face when looking for employment. To be eligible for the INVEST program, an individual must meet three criteria:

- Be 18 years or older
- Be sentenced to adult felony probation
- Have legal Right-to-Work Status in the United States

The eligibility criteria broadened in September 2020 to include people with nonviolent, nonserious, and nonsexual convictions who were released from California state prison and received Post-Release Community Supervision at the local level from county probation (rather than being supervised by state parole, as people released from state prisons often are).⁶ This group is referred to as people on AB 109 Probation, and this report highlights results for them specifically alongside the broader population of people on probation.

The program aims to serve clients who have the ability to participate in services and seek employment, and, accordingly, INVEST staff members considered some additional factors to help determine which candidates might be best suited for the program. (For example, they tended not to include potential clients whose terms of probation would conflict with program participation, or who needed treatment for substance use disorders). Upon enrollment, each INVEST client works with a team of two AJCC staff members and one deputy probation officer.⁷

- *Career development specialists* are employees of AJCCs. They provide intensive employment and career-development services tailored to the needs and barriers of people who have been involved in the criminal legal system. They are responsible for conducting assessments, providing employment-readiness programs and workshops, referring clients to training providers and temporary subsidized employment, providing supportive services, and providing services and other forms of support to help people keep jobs.
- *Business services representatives* are also employees of AJCCs. They establish relationships with employers who are open to hiring people who have been involved in the criminal legal

6. In 2011 the California Legislature and Governor passed Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109). AB 109 established the California Public Safety Realignment Act of 2011, which allowed people to be resentenced to Post-Release Community Supervision. People on Post-Release Community Supervision are supervised by probation officers located at separate AB 109 offices, but under the same terms, conditions, and procedures of traditional probation.

7. INVEST AJCC staff members work full time with INVEST clients and do not carry caseloads of non-INVEST clients. INVEST deputy probation officers do not work full time with INVEST clients and have caseloads of INVEST and non-INVEST clients.

system. They coordinate job fairs, identify employers, match INVEST clients to relevant job postings, and educate employers about the Fair Chance Act.⁸

- **Deputy probation officers** are employees of the Los Angeles County Probation Department. They screen clients to determine their eligibility and refer them to the INVEST program if appropriate. They also conduct program orientation sessions with clients and non-INVEST probation officers to educate them about the INVEST program. They work in the same offices as the AJCC staff members noted above and collaborate on individual clients' cases.

Three components distinguish the INVEST model as one specialized for people on probation. These components set INVEST apart from traditional workforce-development services or traditional probation monitoring.

- **Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training:** All INVEST deputy probation officers, career development specialists, and business services representatives are trained to be certified Inclusive Workforce Development Specialists (formerly Offender Workforce Development Specialists). The 160-hour, evidence-based curriculum for this certification was developed by the National Institute of Corrections and the National Career Development Association. It aims to build skills in providing employment services for people who have been involved with the criminal legal system, and was designed to improve collaboration among criminal justice agencies, other government agencies, and community organizations. It includes in-person workshops, virtual sessions, and a group opportunity to apply skills in the field.⁹
- **Collaboration among and shared building space for deputy probation officers and AJCC staff members:** Deputy probation officers are located at INVEST AJCC locations to make it easier for them to collaborate with AJCC staff members. AJCC staff members help clients navigate the workforce system and INVEST probation officers assist them in removing legal and social impediments to work.
- **Additional funding and flexibility for supportive services:** INVEST was designed with significantly more funding for supportive services than typical workforce programs, and more flexibility in how those funds can be used.¹⁰ This component allows staff members to provide multiple services in a flexible manner and to offer financial incentives and stipends to assist clients in meeting their employment goals. The INVEST program encourages its staff to combine funding from multiple sources (a strategy known as “braiding”) and to make as much use as they can of resources outside of INVEST funds. However, staff

8. The Fair Chance Act, which went into effect on January 1, 2018, is a California law that generally prohibits employers with five or more employees from asking about a person's conviction history before making a job offer. See California Civil Rights Department (2022).

9. National Institute of Corrections (2011).

10. There is no set amount of supportive service funds available per participant. These funds are provided by site staff members based on need, and each AJCC has flexibility in determining how much of its total program budget to set aside for supportive services.

members are not required to braid funding before applying INVEST program funds to address immediate or urgent client needs. This approach enables staff members to respond to many client needs and offer financial support while still aiming to make the greatest use of program funding so more people can participate in services.

DEO worked with Probation to identify probation offices in LA County that had a history of making referrals to programs and services. Once those were identified, DEO and Probation looked to see which AJCC offices were located nearby and offered INVEST in those offices. INVEST was first offered at 5 AJCC offices, but then expanded to 10 offices to increase geographic representation, improve accessibility, and ensure that people from all parts of the county could participate.¹¹

11. See Appendix Table A.1 for INVEST AJCC locations.

2

INVEST Study Design

The INVEST evaluation consists of an implementation study and an outcomes study of employment, earnings, and involvement in the criminal legal system. Quantitative analyses cover INVEST participants who enrolled between March 1, 2018, and February 28, 2021—the *study period*. During this time, 1,232 people were enrolled in the INVEST program. Implementation study data sources include interviews with staff members and clients conducted in the summer of 2022, a staff survey administered in the fall of 2022, and demographic and service-use data from multiple sources.¹ The implementation study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Whom did INVEST serve and what was that group’s service needs?
2. What was the system-level management and coordination approach to implementing INVEST?
3. What services were available and what services did clients receive?
4. How did clients experience INVEST?
5. What organizational, policy, and local, contextual factors shaped INVEST design and implementation between the time the program launched and the summer of 2022?

The outcomes study assesses employment, earnings, and criminal legal outcomes 12 months after program enrollment. For employment and earnings, it uses a comparison group of people who did not enroll in the study but were eligible for the program; this comparison group approximates whether INVEST services resulted in improved outcomes. Outcomes were measured using data on workers’ earnings that employers report to the state.² The criminal legal system analysis examines participant arrests, probation cases, and convictions reported in Los Angeles County. There is not a comparison group for these outcomes,

-
1. Additional detail on data sources and study methodology for the implementation and outcomes studies is available in Appendix B.
 2. The data come from the California Employment Development Department, the state agency where all employers must file earnings for the purposes of unemployment insurance.

so they are put into context using results from another study of a similar population. The outcomes study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Compared with people referred to but not enrolled in INVEST, are clients more likely to be employed after 12 months?
2. Compared with people referred to but not enrolled in INVEST, do clients have greater total earnings after 12 months?
3. What are the criminal legal system outcomes (rearrests, revocations of probation, and incarcerations) for INVEST clients?

3

INVEST Program Implementation

- Overall, the INVEST program is being implemented as intended. As of 2022, a variety of employment services and training and educational opportunities were available to clients. INVEST staff members drew on flexible funding to provide supportive services and financial incentives. Nearly all INVEST America’s Job Center of California (AJCC) offices had an INVEST-dedicated deputy probation officer located there, and nearly all INVEST staff members reported that they had completed Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training.
- The services used most frequently were those related to finding employment quickly, and services that take place as part of enrollment or very soon thereafter. Only about one-third of INVEST clients (35 percent) enrolled in any type of training. Skill-building training had the most enrollees, with 23 percent of INVEST clients enrolling. Fewer than half of INVEST clients (44 percent) received any type of supportive service. Transportation assistance was the most frequently used supportive service, followed by the provision of work-related tools or clothing.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM SERVICES

A New Collaboration Among Los Angeles County Agencies

INVEST represents the first time that the LA County workforce system offered a program specific to people on probation. INVEST leaders from the Reentry Division, Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), and Probation shared with interviewers the challenges of agencies with different cultures and goals establishing new relationships and services. The partners had to bring each other up to speed in their different fields of expertise and learn to coordinate and work together, and it took time to learn to work together productively and collaboratively; program leaders noted that the first year and a half was particularly challenging.

The partners also identified the importance of having the right people on staff, specifically people with ground-level operational knowledge, to design and implement a program that requires so much interagency collaboration. For example, Probation staff members approached conversations about where to offer INVEST services from a safety perspective and made sure the partners considered the implications of certain AJCC locations for people with certain gang affiliations. One staff member shared, “I think [INVEST is] a very good example of an interdepartmental collaboration, a program that we’re not trying to compete with each other, we’re trying to really leverage each other’s expertise, and skill sets and resources to best serve the population.”

Regular meetings between Probation and DEO leaders were opportunities to review various data points, including numbers of referrals, numbers of referrals that turned into enrollments, referral sources, numbers of clients in training, numbers of clients completing the program, and numbers of clients becoming employed. These program leaders also shared information with INVEST AJCCs during monthly meetings, such as resources and different agencies that might be able to support INVEST clients.

Sharing Offices

INVEST leaders explained that at the beginning of the program, the plan was to have two deputy probation officers at each INVEST AJCC, but that they then decided that two could make the program appear slanted toward law enforcement, which could turn off potential INVEST clients. A staff member explained, “It has no effect on me if I see two probation officers or two police. But think about a person ... who has been in a correctional facility or a person who’s out on probation but they were in jail for a while?” Interview and survey data showed some variation in establishing shared space across the 10 INVEST AJCC offices. While most INVEST AJCC locations had one dedicated probation officer in them, two offices had the same officer who split time between them, and one officer reported coming to an AJCC office once or twice a week, but being primarily located at another probation office. INVEST deputy probation officers and AJCC staff members at all INVEST AJCCs reported that they communicated with each other about their work or individual clients multiple times a week, if not every day.

Staff members who were interviewed all spoke positively about being located in the same office and the level of collaboration across roles, with one AJCC staff member saying “the partnership that we have with Probation is priceless.” That same staff member also said that this collaboration was supported by the Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training, where Probation and AJCC staff members were able to learn more about the others’ work.¹ Staff members mentioned that they valued being able to check in and get updates about clients immediately, and the fact that if an issue came up for a client, they could discuss it as

1. According to the Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist administrative guide, an essential element of the training is that “it promotes collaboration between criminal justice agencies and a broad array of governmental agencies and community organizations.” National Institute of Corrections (2011).

a team and come up with a plan on the spot. AJCC staff members also appreciated that the deputy probation officers could help locate clients who disengaged from the program, since they had access to more systems and a network of other probation officers. Staff members also said it was more convenient for clients when they could go to one place and meet with a probation officer and then the career development specialist right after. This convenience was particularly valuable, they said, since many clients faced transportation issues.

Staff Turnover

Staff turnover was mentioned as a challenge during interviews, and the staff survey also identified it as one. Based on the staff survey responses, however, different staff members experienced turnover differently, with many more deputy probation officers reporting it as a problem than other INVEST staff members.² About one-half of the business services representatives and career development specialists who responded to the survey had been in their positions for fewer than 4 years, whereas most deputy probation officers had been in their positions for over 10 years. As one staff member put it, “High turnover, it impacts the operation because now you have these clients in limbo, because nobody’s contacting them, nobody is answering them, nobody’s following up with them.... I think sometimes that also could hurt a little bit [of] the process in the program.” One staff member offered that the Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training could have been a contributing factor in turnover, because it is a sought-after credential that makes one a more desirable candidate for other jobs.

Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist Training and Understanding Clients’ Experiences

All INVEST staff members were supposed to have completed the Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training to prepare them to meet the needs of job seekers on probation. Of the 21 staff members who responded to a staff survey question about attending that training, 2 responded that they had not attended it.³ Survey data showed that all respondents who attended the training agreed that it was helpful, and staff members interviewed overwhelmingly spoke positively of the training and found it beneficial. They talked about how it gave them a better understanding of the barriers their clients on probation faced, which helped them serve those clients better. One said, “I think the whole reentry wave of assistance is changing. And I think everybody needs to get that ... training to understand where this population is coming from.”

-
2. Eighty percent of deputy probation officers, 43 percent of business services representatives, and 17 percent of career development specialists surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that frequent staff turnover was a problem. Probation officer survey respondents were also more likely to be in their Probation positions much longer than the AJCC staff members, which may have meant they were more likely to feel the effects of staff turnover.
 3. It is possible that these staff members were participating in the training at the time of the survey but had not completed it. The training is 160 hours spread over several weeks and staff members could start working with the INVEST program before they had completed it.

In interviews, clients did express that the INVEST staff understood them and knew what forms of support they needed. Several clients explained that the INVEST staff members they worked with understood their situations and the barriers they faced, in some cases more than other people in their lives. Clients also frequently said they trusted the staff a great deal and were willing to speak with them about their concerns or needs.

The importance of building a relationship with clients came up in several interviews. One INVEST staff member explained that the program was not just about connecting an individual to a job or training. Instead, the program relies on developing relationships with clients:

So they understand that they can trust the people that are working with them through INVEST to be able to address those needs and not feel ashamed or worried that they're going to be kicked out of the program or worried that they're going to be scolded in some kind of way.... We tell them up front "We're ready. And we hope that it's going to be a straight line for you, but we understand there's going to be ups and downs, and we're here to support you through those challenges."

Another client described her relationship with the staff member, saying that:

With INVEST, I felt like it was taking weight off my shoulders because they were helping me with school and, like, I had people to talk to that understood my record. You know, everybody at home really didn't understand why I couldn't really get a job, but [my INVEST case manager] gave me hope and she helped me a lot.

INVEST CLIENTS

Table 3.1 shows demographic information about INVEST clients enrolled in the program during the study period. There are some notable differences between those on standard probation and AB 109 Probation. Of 1,232 people enrolled, three-quarters are male. The average age at the time of enrollment was 34, and more than 80 percent of clients were under 45. Nearly half identified as Hispanic (48 percent). Most clients had received a high school diploma or the equivalent (72 percent), and nearly one-fifth of clients (19 percent) reported being homeless at the time of enrollment. Finally, about a quarter (28 percent) had reported earnings in the calendar quarter that they were referred to the program. The average earnings for the full sample in the quarter of enrollment were \$852; earnings among those with reported earnings were \$3,071 in that quarter.⁴

4. Earnings data are applicable to the entire calendar quarter in which the individual was referred to INVEST. For example, if someone was referred January 20, 2020, then earnings are applicable to the first quarter of 2020.

Table 3.1. Demographic Characteristics of INVEST Clients at the Time of Enrollment into the Program, by Type of Probation

Demographic Characteristic	All Clients	Standard Probation	AB 109 Probation
Gender (%)			
Female	23.9	28.9	8.5
Male	75.2	70.2	90.4
Unknown gender	0.9	0.9	1.1
Ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	48.1	46.7	50.4
Not Hispanic	45.6	47.1	42.6
Unknown ethnicity	6.2	6.2	7.1
Age (%)			
18-24	20.7	24.4	7.4
25-34	37.2	36.7	40.1
35-44	24.2	21.3	33.3
45+	17.9	17.6	19.1
High school diploma or equivalent (%)	71.6	72.5	69.1
Current housing status (%)			
Not homeless	81.1	81.8	80.5
Employment and earnings			
Reported earnings in the baseline quarter (%)	27.7	25.4	35.1
Earnings in the baseline quarter (\$)	851.7	789.8	1,047.0
Earnings in the baseline quarter among those employed (\$)	3,071.4	3,110.3	2,982.4
Sample size	1,232	919	282

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on CalJOBS, ARS, and EDD data. See Appendix B for more on these data sources.

NOTES: AB 109 Probation and Standard Probation refer to the classification of the probation case that is linked to the INVEST referral. AB 109 is a special type of probation that is specific to California. The sample sizes shown in the table are slightly different for the employment and earnings measures (1,172, 890, and 282, respectively) because EDD data were missing for some people in the sample. “Unknown gender” and “unknown ethnicity” include “not disclosed” responses. Employment and earnings data are attributed to the calendar quarter in which the client was referred. All other data presented in this table are from the point of enrollment, which typically happens 16 days after referral. Earnings are the sum of all reported earnings for that quarter.

The quarter of clients in the INVEST study sample who were on AB 109 Probation had some different characteristics. They were older than clients on standard probation at the time of enrollment, with fewer people between 18 and 24 and more 35 and over. Fewer of them were female and more had reported earnings at the time of enrollment. In addition, program staff members noted that they were more likely to need assistance with housing and legal documentation, since they had often been incarcerated for longer than clients on standard probation.⁵ Program staff members shared that clients on AB 109 Probation faced more barriers to program participation and employment than those on standard probation. One staff member also explained that clients on AB 109 probation often needed more training in soft skills (for example, interview skills or appropriate workplace behavior) because they had been out of the workforce longer.

Table 3.2 provides information about clients' involvement with the criminal legal system at the time of program enrollment for the people in the sample who were not on AB 109 Probation. Measures for the AB 109 Probation group are not shown separately because those with AB 109 status are likely to have been released from state prison sentences. These sentences are typically longer, so measures of recent involvement in the legal system are less informative. Additionally, criminal legal system data for this study only include LA County jail incarceration, which understates the actual level of criminal legal system involvement among clients, particularly those on AB 109 Probation status. Among those on standard probation, about one-third

Table 3.2. Recent Criminal Legal System Involvement of INVEST Clients at the Time of Enrollment into the Program

Characteristic	INVEST clients
Arrests in the previous 2 years (%)	
Never arrested	30.1
Never arrested for a felony	33.6
Never arrested for a violent felony	84.2
Incarceration in the previous 2 years	
Never incarcerated (%)	30.8
Days incarcerated	80.7
Convictions in the previous 2 years (%)	
Never convicted	37.5
Never convicted of a felony	45.3
Never convicted of a violent felony	90.1
Sample size	928

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on CalJOBS and InfoHub data. See Appendix B for more on these data sources.

NOTES: Sample includes only people who were not on AB 109 Probation, since they might have been released from a long prison sentence shortly before enrollment, making measures of recent involvement in the legal system less informative. Days incarcerated is calculated only among those who were ever incarcerated during that period. "Felony" and "violent felony" refer to the most serious charge associated with a client's arrest(s) or conviction(s). Conviction date is based on the date of the charge that resulted in a conviction. INVEST clients had to be serving a probation sentence, which means they had all had some involvement in the criminal legal system in the past.

5. All AB 109 clients have been incarcerated at some point in time, whereas non-AB 109 clients would not necessarily have ever been incarcerated before being on probation. Nguyen, Grattet, and Bird (2017).

of INVEST clients had not been arrested or incarcerated in the two years before the program (30 percent). Among those who had arrests or incarcerations in the two years before enrolling, 66 percent had arrests that led to felony charges (95 percent of those arrested for any charge — not shown) and 16 percent had been charged with a violent felony (23 percent of those arrested for any charge — not shown). Of the roughly two-thirds of the sample who had been incarcerated in the previous two years, they spent on average 81 days incarcerated.

Another important element of involvement in the criminal legal system pertains to involvement going back more than two years. These measures are presented in Appendix Table A.2 and are shown there by probation status. Unlike Table 3.2, Appendix Table A.2 presents involvement going back more than two years for both people on AB 109 Probation and other standard types of probation. People on AB 109 Probation were more likely to have been in contact with the criminal legal system two to five years before enrollment in INVEST than were people on other kinds of probation.

PROGRAM RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

The recruitment process mainly went through INVEST staff members, and it could occur in either one or two steps. One possibility was that an INVEST staff member reached out to a potential client directly. In other cases, referrals could come from non-INVEST deputy probation officers who identified people on probation in need of workforce-development services and referred them to INVEST deputy probation officers to confirm eligibility. Once potential clients reached INVEST deputy probation officers, the officers used some subjectivity to assess whether INVEST was the best program to address their needs. For example, they considered factors that could limit a client's ability to participate in the program fully, such as the need to treat a substance use disorder or mental health issue, conflicting conditions of probation (such as a large number of community service hours) that would limit available work hours, and time left on probation (as people with little time left on probation would not be ideal candidates, because they would become ineligible for the program when their probation sentences ended). Once an INVEST officer was ready to make a program referral, the client was entered into the Automated Referral System maintained by the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity.

INVEST staff members regularly conducted orientation and recruitment efforts at probation offices to educate probation officers about program services and eligibility, and to recruit clients. Several INVEST staff members reported that the orientation and recruitment efforts at probation offices were particularly effective at generating referrals and enrollments. They explained that being able to present the program to probation officers in person helped to develop relationships that resulted in probation officers being more likely to refer clients to them. INVEST staff members encouraged probation officers to invite their clients to the

orientations so that they could screen, refer, and enroll clients on the spot. INVEST staff members also led information sessions at courthouses and AB 109 offices.⁶

INVEST clients, program staff members, and leaders reported some challenges with recruitment and referrals. Some staff members reported that in the early years of the program, probation officers were stricter about whom they would refer to the program, only wanting to send the people whom they thought were most likely to be successful, rather than anyone who was eligible and could use help with employment. This practice resulted in a lower number of referrals and enrollments than expected. Other recruitment problems included confusion about the screening and referral processes among non-INVEST probation officers, resulting in some probation officers referring people to INVEST officers who were ineligible, and others not referring people who would have been eligible. Finally, during interviews, two INVEST clients recommended that having someone with lived experience with the criminal legal system to help recruit clients would probably get more people interested in the program, suggesting that the lack of people with such lived experience may have made recruitment more difficult.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented additional challenges for program recruitment and led to changes in the recruitment approach. Staff members explained that the pandemic caused probation offices to close and that people were being released from jail without notification, so there were no referrals coming in from probation officers early on during the pandemic. Once probation offices reopened (virtually at first), INVEST staff members shifted to virtual orientations with probation offices. These orientations made it harder for some potential clients to attend, as many of them lacked access to the appropriate technology. Staff members also mentioned that the pandemic caused staffing changes for probation offices, with probation officers being called on to work in juvenile correctional facilities to fill staffing shortages, which made it more difficult for them to make referrals for their clients. Appendix Figure A.1 shows the number of referrals per month during the study period. In response to the pandemic the State of California issued a stay-at-home order on March 19, 2020, which aligns with a large drop in program referrals.⁷

Once an INVEST deputy probation officer made a referral in the Automated Referral System, it was sent to the career development specialist located at the same INVEST AJCC as that probation officer. The career development specialist then made contact with a referred client to arrange an appointment for program enrollment. During the enrollment process, INVEST staff members collected demographic information and evaluated clients' career interests and skills, and the needs that needed to be addressed for them to participate in the program successfully.

6. Staff members also mentioned handing out fliers at probation offices and other places in the community, arranging referrals from partner organizations and transitional homes, and recruiting at resource and job fairs. INVEST also received clients who learned of the program from existing clients, and as walk-ins to INVEST AJCC offices.

7. Cowan (2021).

The skills and career interest assessments were used to create client case plans or career maps. Based on assessment results, staff members could start researching training programs or other relevant information, such as work-experience opportunities in a client’s professional field of interest. The goal of finding employment opportunities in a client’s field of interest came up in several interviews. As one program leader put it, “My goal is not really to create an army of construction workers,” but to have INVEST be a program “where people have access to jobs that would appeal to them, whether they were on probation or not.”

INVEST staff members revealed some challenges related to enrollment, the most frequently mentioned being clients lacking documentation necessary for both program enrollment and employment (a California state ID or driver’s license, a birth certificate, and a Social Security number). The INVEST program assisted potential clients with obtaining the necessary documents but sometimes would lose contact with them before they could obtain all of them.

CLIENT SERVICE USE

INVEST is a voluntary program, so clients were not required to enroll or participate. The program was not designed with any ideal or desired length of time for clients to remain enrolled or receive services. Over three-quarters of clients who enrolled in INVEST left the program within 12 months (78 percent); on average, clients remained in the program for 5.3 months before they exited.

Employment Services

INVEST AJCCs offered many employment services to clients that were also available to non-INVEST clients served at the same AJCCs: résumé writing, job search and placement assistance, interview preparation, job-skills and interests assessments, and opportunities for subsidized employment and vocational training. All locations also provided INVEST clients with individual case management, expanded financial incentives and stipends (only available to INVEST clients), and follow-up services for clients after they found employment for up to a year. As shown in Table 3.3, almost all participants used career services provided by the staff to all clients (89 percent), with the most commonly used of these types of services being job search and placement assistance, assistance with résumé preparation, and proficiency testing (not shown). A similar percentage used career services tailored to their individual needs (81 percent), where the most common were developing an independent employment plan, an individual service strategy, or what was called an “employment-development plan”; objective assessments; mentorship; and interest and aptitude testing (not shown).⁸

On the other hand, fewer than one-third of clients participated in a workshop (31 percent). INVEST clients were eligible for a workshop series exclusively available to them; participants

8. These are standard workforce services available to all AJCC clients, though in INVEST they were delivered by staff members who had received Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training.

Table 3.3. Client Use of INVEST Services

Service Category	Percentage Using the Service
Initial assessment and orientation	98.2
Self-guided career services	13.0
Career services provided by staff members to all clients	88.6
Career services individually tailored to clients' needs	80.5
Workshops	30.7
Referrals to other providers in the community	7.7
Any training	34.9
A transitional job or work experience	15.7
On-the-job training	1.6
Any skill-building training before employment	22.8
Supportive services	44.3
Incentives (all)	28.9
Incentives during the program	25.6
Incentives in the year after leaving the program	7.9
Services in the year after leaving the program	7.2
Sample size	1,232

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on CalJOBS data. See Appendix B for more on this data source.

NOTES: Individuals can use more than one service. Services categories were created by MDRC based on descriptions of specific services offered at AJCCs. Self-guided services might be pamphlets or other types of references that helped people search and apply for immediate employment, including labor market research, job fairs, or information about training providers. Career services provided by INVEST staff members to all clients offered more hands-on support that was standardized and geared toward immediate employment. This category includes job search and placement assistance, proficiency testing, résumé preparation, and specific job referrals. Career services individually tailored to clients' needs included career guidance, counseling and mentoring, aptitudes testing and assessment, and individual education plans.

Workshops were only available to INVEST clients. AJCCs offered many types of workshops, but the data only indicate whether a client took at least one workshop of any kind.

Clients could enroll in more than one form of training. Transitional jobs and work experience are combined in the table because that is how the program categorized the data. Skill-building training included various types of training, with the most common being training in occupational skills.

Supportive services were designed to help clients meet needs in their lives, for example, assistance with transportation or rent. Some were available to all AJCC clients, and some were only available to INVEST clients. Similarly, some incentives were available to all AJCC clients, and some incentives and stipends were only available to INVEST clients.

received \$50 gift cards after completing each one, for a total of up to \$300 over six workshops. The workshop topics were work readiness/workplace norms, education on the Fair Chance Act, adult financial literacy, how to overcome barriers particular to people on probation, healthy relationships, and computer-based skills. Some locations held live workshops that were available simultaneously online and in person, led by a staff member, while other locations only offered recorded workshops online that clients completed at their own pace. Clients could use computers in the AJCC offices for workshops if needed.

Training

The INVEST program provided clients with a variety of opportunities for training. Just over one-third of clients engaged in any training opportunity with INVEST. Clients who enrolled in skills-building training programs (such as preapprenticeship training, apprenticeship training, occupational skills training, or skills upgrading and retraining) were eligible for financial stipends to support them while they received that training. Examples shared by staff members and clients include Occupational Health and Safety Administration certification, commercial driver's license training, food-safety training, training in commercial painting, and training to become a substance use disorder counselor. About one-quarter of clients engaged in skill-building training; half of those clients entered that training within 76 days — or about two and a half months — which would be halfway through the average person's time in the program of a little over five months (not shown).⁹

INVEST also offered transitional, subsidized employment. Such employment is an approach to help disadvantaged workers succeed in the labor market where a government or private agency temporarily subsidizes all or a portion of wages for job seekers to provide a bridge to unsubsidized employment and improve clients' longer-term employment prospects.¹⁰ This training option was typically offered to clients who needed some work experience.¹¹ The approximately 17 percent of clients who started a transitional job or on-the-job training typically began their training a little over two months after enrolling (median time of 70 days, not shown), though some started much later (average time of 120 days, not shown). Approximately 65 percent of clients who started training (or 11 percent of all clients) successfully completed it. One staff member described transitional subsidized employment as a “trial-and-error” process for both the client and the employer, using the time “to see, are they showing up on time? Are they following directions? How are they getting along with others?” Another staff member noted that transitional subsidized employment offers clients a chance to ease into working, particularly for clients who may have anxiety about returning to work. One client shared that “[transitional subsidized employment] was really helpful to

9. It should be noted that people sometimes started training much later into the program. The average time to start training was 117 days (not shown).

10. Cummings and Bloom (2020).

11. Transitional subsidized employment positions could last up to 300 hours and were paid at the LA County minimum wage (\$15/hour at the time of the interviews in 2022, \$17.27/hour as of July 1, 2024). Clients could work full-time or part-time hours. Some of these jobs involved food service, administrative work, and positions at social service organizations.

me in getting me back to the working field,” especially because it was related to this client’s employment interests. Another client stated that working a transitional job through INVEST “kind of put me back on track” and motivated her to feel ready to pursue school after stabilizing her life through work. Training takes time, and even though INVEST provided financial incentives for participating, many clients’ priority was immediate employment. This focus on employment may have been why only about one-third of clients enrolled in any type of training. In interviews, clients who had participated in training appreciated not only being able to receive training and certifications, but also that the training was paid for. Said one client:

Not being able to come out of pocket for the [training] classes because I know that these classes cost. So for them to be able to pay for that, pay for the equipment, pay for the uniform, and also give you some money for you going to the classes, like, yeah, I couldn’t be more grateful.

However, staff members and clients also expressed the desire for a wider range of training and transitional employment opportunities. Some of this need for more options seemed to be regionally specific, with some AJCC locations having more options than others, depending on the providers and types of employers around them.

Supportive Services

While INVEST had general policies and guidelines and offered AJCCs recommendations and suggestions for allowable supportive services, ultimately, each AJCC had its own internal processes and approval structure, which meant there was variation in the implementation of supportive services. For example, some locations described being able to pay rent for clients, while other locations could not. Overall, fewer than half of all INVEST clients (44 percent, as shown in Table 3.3) received any type of supportive service. Transportation was by far the most frequently provided supportive service. Staff members and clients regularly mentioned transportation as a common and significant barrier to employment, often while also mentioning how large Los Angeles County is.¹² Providing tools and work clothing was also a popular supportive service.

Staff members spoke very highly of the additional funding and flexibility for supportive services and noted that it was a change from their experiences with traditional workforce programming and allowed for more individually tailored support. One staff member explained:

The luxurious thing about the INVEST Program is the flexibility of it. It really just depends on the needs of the individual.... We bought people glasses, we have paid rent, we pay utility bills, we’ve purchased cell phones. We’ve helped people with their car insurance. I mean, it’s really been kind of endless in terms of what the individual might need.

12. Los Angeles County is one of the larger counties in the United States (spanning 4,084 square miles), which makes it difficult to use public transportation to get around, particularly outside of the most urban areas in the county.

Other services that staff members highlighted were providing computers, phone bill payments, WiFi hotspots, gas cards, Uber rides, and hotel rooms the night before job interviews so clients could be clean and well rested. A staff member reflected that INVEST provided more funding for incentives and stipends in particular than most workforce programs, stating that many “don’t always have the kind of money that is needed in order to make it happen, but this program does, and it’s fantastic.” For one client, the program provided a laptop and Wi-Fi hotspot when she started an educational program. She reflected that with “every barrier that I met, they had a solution,” helping her find ways to make money while enrolled in school.

Incentives

According to staff members, incentives primarily served two purposes: They kept clients engaged in services at various points and provided clients with money to support themselves as they moved through the program. Beyond workshop and training incentives, clients could also receive incentives for completing employment-related milestones, such as remaining employed for 30, 60, and 90 days, and for at least 6 months. Staff members took different approaches to advertising the availability of incentives. Some noted it was helpful to mention incentives up front as a recruitment tool. Others said that they did not want clients to focus on receiving incentives as their primary motivation for joining a training program.¹³ Yet others said that they did not typically disclose financial incentives to clients because they were concerned about the overall program budget for milestone-based incentives. In fact, two AJCC locations reported that they ran out of funding for incentives at the end of the 2021 fiscal year. This shortfall prompted one of these two locations to change the way it advertised incentives, instead opting to “surprise” clients with their milestone incentive payments.

Only 29 percent of INVEST clients received any type of incentive. This low percentage is not surprising given that most incentives were connected to services such as workshops and training, and those services were not highly used (only 31 percent of clients completed at least one workshop and 35 percent enrolled in any type of training). Clients overwhelmingly appreciated the financial support they received. One client who was working full time after graduating from the INVEST program noted the incentives for reaching employment milestones “[helped with] motivation, you know, and when you’re just starting all over again, everything helps.” Another client described incentives for completing the workshops: “It was definitely needed. I definitely appreciate it. It was motivating. Just to even do it, like, just to be able to get something so you don’t have to worry every day about what you’re going through.”

While staff members appreciated the additional funding available for financial incentives, many recommended that even more funding in this area could be provided. They explained that even though the current funding available to INVEST clients was more than would be available in traditional workforce programs, it still wasn’t enough for clients to sustain themselves while they were in training or looking for work, and that if there were even more money to assist with costs such as housing and food, then more clients would be able to take

13. Shanshory (2023).

advantage of a wider range of program services. This perspective was echoed by several clients who agreed that while the money they received through incentives and transitional employment was helpful, it was not enough to live on.

PROGRAM SATISFACTION

Overall, staff members and clients viewed the INVEST program positively, and felt that it was effective in helping clients reach their employment goals. All staff members who responded to the staff survey agreed that INVEST staff members did their best to understand clients' barriers to employment, and that the INVEST program was effective at helping clients become employed. One career development specialist said that INVEST was:

... more comprehensive than any other program that I've worked for. I've worked with [other employment services providers], they've had programs that assist [justice-system]-involved individuals. But they're not as comprehensive as this. They don't provide all the supports, they don't provide the stipend, they don't provide the incentives, and the training available for them. This is a very, very good program, brilliant, it's probably the best that I've seen.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

While it seems like the INVEST program was implemented as intended, client participation in the various program opportunities varied significantly. Clients made the most use of those services related to finding employment quickly, and services that took place as part of enrollment or very soon thereafter. Staff members explained that this pattern appeared because clients who were re-entering their communities after having been in jail or prison needed an immediate source of income to help them meet many other needs (housing, food, transportation, support for families, etc.).¹⁴ While helpful to many clients, the additional funding and flexibility for supportive services (including financial incentives) did not provide enough support to most to allow them to participate in services not aimed at immediate employment. Furthermore, during the study period and following the initial economic shocks of COVID-19, Los Angeles County followed the general trend of the rest of the United States, with a low unemployment rate and many job vacancies. The availability of jobs during this time may also partially explain some clients' choice to work immediately.

14. The majority of INVEST participants were not incarcerated immediately before entering the program. Only 36 percent of clients had been incarcerated at the county level at any point in the year before enrolling in the program (not shown), so clients who emphasized immediate employment probably were doing so for different reasons. The need for immediate income is not exclusive to people who have been released from incarceration recently.

4

Comparing INVEST Program Employment Outcomes with a Comparison Group

- During a one-year follow-up period (which began about a year after people were referred to INVEST, as detailed below), people who enrolled in INVEST had higher employment rates (by 11.7 percentage points) and higher earnings (by \$1,931) than a comparison group who did not enroll in the program after being referred. This difference overwhelmingly reflects results from one subgroup who had no reported earnings in the quarter they were referred to the program. However, data limitations make it difficult to proclaim with any confidence that the INVEST program is the reason for these differences.

This chapter describes the analysis investigating whether the INVEST program was successful in enhancing employment outcomes. An ideal study would incorporate a comparison group of people who were similar to INVEST participants except for the fact that they did not receive INVEST services. For the current study, however, the comparison group was made up of people referred to INVEST who did not enroll. It is likely that this group differs from INVEST participants in some way because individuals made the decision to enroll or not enroll. Although data and statistical methods can help to reduce these differences, the current study had very limited information on people included in the analysis. For that reason, readers should interpret the results as only suggestive of the effects of INVEST.

STUDY SAMPLE AND DATA IN THE EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

The employment analysis uses a different sample than the implementation analysis described in Chapter 3. The sample for the employment analysis is made up of individuals who

were referred to INVEST during the study period and had a valid Social Security number.¹ It includes the INVEST clients, or “participants,” described in the implementation study as well as a comparison group of people who were referred but did not enroll in INVEST.² Due to the expanded sample used in this analysis, all measures in this chapter (unlike those in the rest of the report) are calculated from the date of referral to the program rather than the date of enrollment.³

Employment outcome measures were constructed using quarterly earnings data. As described in Figure 4.1, the quarterly data extend from the calendar quarter in which each person was referred to the program through two years after the referral was made, split into two separate periods in relation to when the person was referred.⁴ The first period, the “program period,” includes the quarter in which the person was referred (the “baseline quarter” or “Q0”) and the two subsequent quarters (Q1 and Q2). Next, data are available for the “follow-up period,” each of four full calendar quarters that start in the fourth full calendar quarter after the baseline quarter (“Q4” through “Q7”).⁵ This follow-up period from Q4 through Q7 is the period for which the results of participants and the comparison group are compared.

Figure 4.1. Employment Data Time Periods Relative to Program Referral

Quarter of referral	1 Q after referral	2 Q after referral	3 Q after referral	4 Q after referral	5 Q after referral	6 Q after referral	7 Q after referral
“Program period”			No data	“Follow-up period”			
Q0	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7

The quarterly earnings data include earnings from all jobs reported to the state in each quarter in the sample period. Information on hours worked in each job is not included in the data. In addition to the earnings data, the study had access to very limited information about people in the sample at the time of referral. The data are limited to gender, age, and date of program referral, as well as whether the person had an active AB 109 Probation case.

1. All participants during the study period had valid Social Security numbers, but not all nonparticipants did. The study team found that nonparticipants with and without valid Social Security numbers were similar with respect to all characteristics available in the data (not shown).
2. For more information on the sample used in the employment analysis, see Appendix Table A.2.
3. On average, INVEST participants were enrolled in the program 16 days after they were referred.
4. Quarterly earnings data are based on the calendar quarter. The referral date could be at any point in the calendar quarter. For example, the data for an individual referred on January 20, 2020, would start with earnings from the first calendar quarter of 2020 (January through March).
5. For example, for a person referred on January 20, 2020, earnings data are available starting the calendar quarter from January 1, 2020, through March 31, 2020. Q1 would be made up of earnings between April 1, 2020, through June 30, 2020, and Q4 would be made up of earnings between January 1, 2021, and March 31, 2021.

ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

The team conducted an analysis comparing employment outcomes measures between INVEST participants and the comparison group, adjusting for differences between the two groups.

As described above, the data available to make statistical adjustments included employment measures only for the quarter of referral – Q0. Importantly, only about a third of individuals in the sample had any reported earnings in Q0 (28 percent, not shown), reducing the amount of information for the analysis. For those without reported earnings, the analysis could not adjust differences in employment measures between the participants and comparison group.

For this reason, the analysis was conducted separately for the subgroups of the sample who did and did not have earnings in Q0.⁶ For those who had reported earnings in Q0, the analysis adjusted for earnings in Q0 and demographics in comparing participants and the comparison group. For those without earnings in Q0, the comparison could only adjust for the available demographic characteristics. Appendix B describes the analysis in more detail.

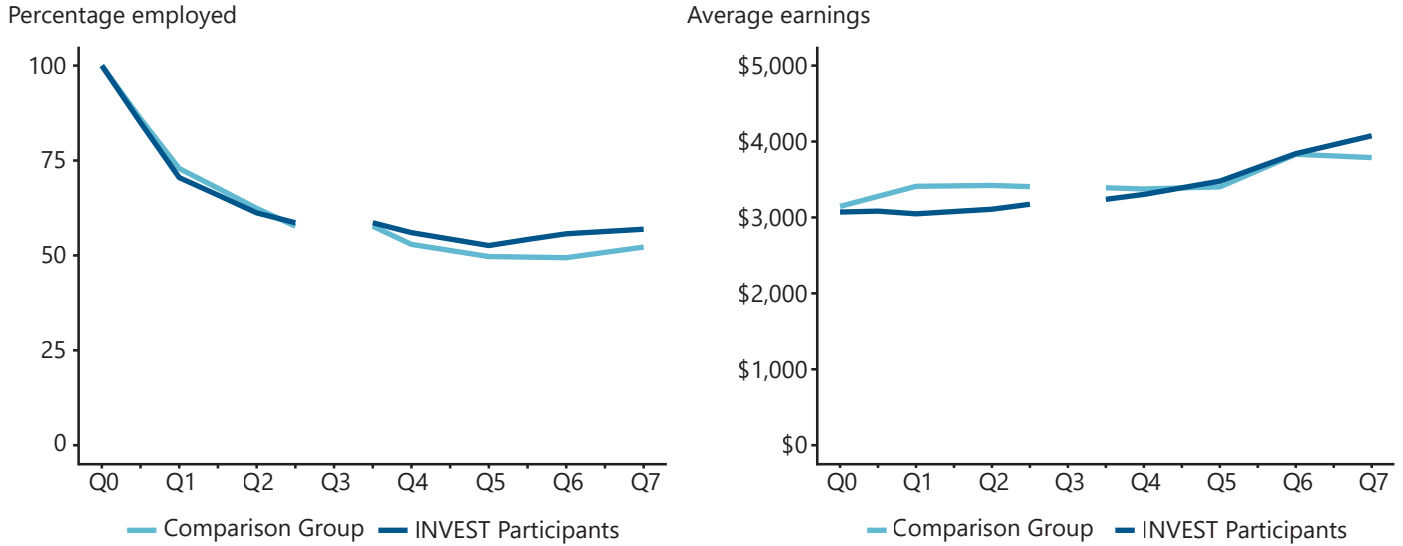
Figure 4.2 compares employment outcomes, without adjustment, between INVEST participants and the comparison group over the study period for the subgroups separately. The top panel shows that for the group that did have reported earnings in Q0, employment outcomes were similar both in Q0 and in the follow-up period. On the other hand, the bottom panel shows that among those without reported earnings in Q0, the group who participated in INVEST had consistently better employment outcomes in the follow-up period. The results from the analysis that adjusts for baseline characteristics, described in more detail in Appendix B, are similar and therefore not shown here.⁷

As shown in Appendix Table B.3, for the entire sample, there was a difference of just under \$2,000 in earnings (\$1,931) between participants and the comparison group for the year that makes up Q4 through Q7 (approximately the period of one to two years after referral). Participants were also 11.7 percentage points more likely to work in this period and on average worked 0.3 more quarters (about a month more) over the one-year period than the comparison group. The subgroup analysis described in Appendix B demonstrates that the overall findings presented here mainly reflect results for the subgroup without reported earnings in Q0.

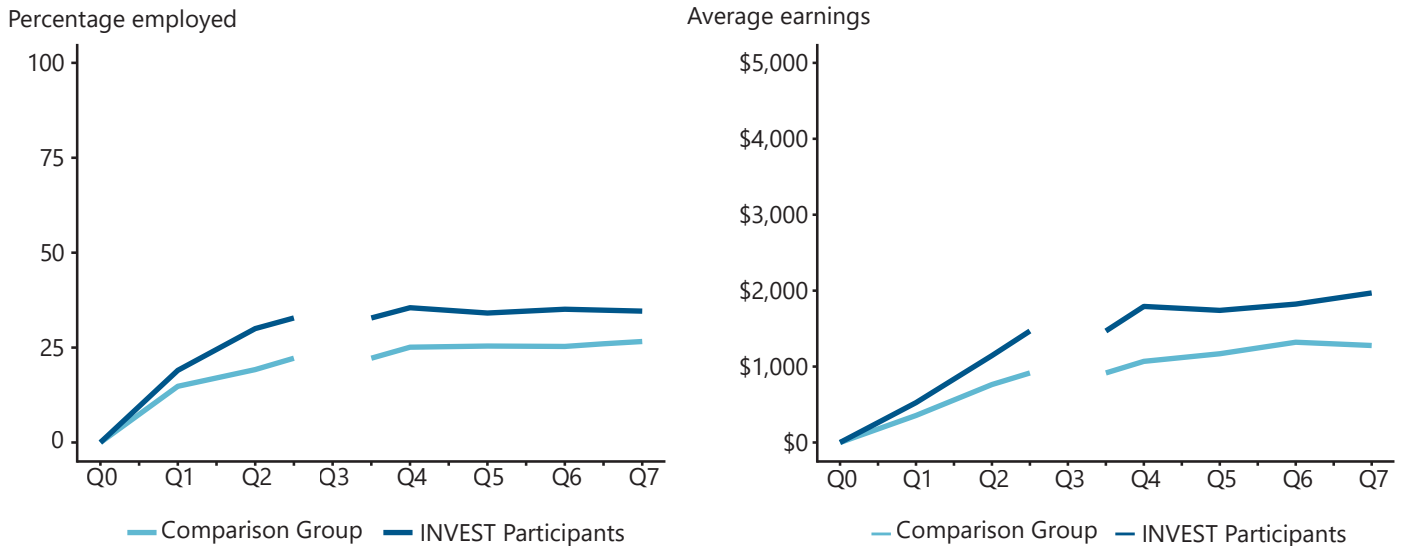
-
6. The team also examined whether incorporating the first full quarter after referral to the program (Q1) into the baseline measure of earnings affected the results. Most participants would still be receiving services during this period, so one would not expect outcomes to be affected by adding Q1 to the baseline measure. In this analysis, earnings from Q0 and Q1 were added and incorporated as the baseline earnings in the model, which increased the share of people in the sample with any baseline earnings. The results were very similar using this method.
 7. In this analysis, employment outcome measures were created that sum the four quarters from the follow-up period. The results in Appendix Table B.3 show the same basic patterns as are shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Average Earnings and Employment Rates Over Time Among INVEST Participants and the Comparison Group

Subgroup With Reported Earnings in Q0



Subgroup Without Reported Earnings in Q0



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on EDD data. See Appendix B for more on this data source.

NOTES: Sample size for the top panel (sample members with reported wages in Q0) is 639: 325 participants and 314 non-participants. Sample size for the bottom panel (sample members without reported earnings in Q0) is 1,649: 847 participants and 802 nonparticipants. Q0 refers to the calendar quarter in which an individual was referred to the program, Q1 is the first full calendar quarter after referral, etc. The quarterly earnings data available to the study did not include consistent data for Q3. This data gap is represented by the missing lines in Q3. Earnings are the sum of earnings reported by all employers in that quarter and quarters for individuals with zero earnings are included in the average.

LIMITATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF RESULTS

There are two possible interpretations for the difference in results between the subgroups with and without reported earnings in Q0. The first interpretation is that the data limitations are more significant for the subgroup without reported earnings, and thus the observed positive difference in employment outcomes between INVEST participants and the comparison group is due to the analysis being less able to adjust for differences within this subgroup. The second interpretation is that the program was more effective for the subgroup who was not earning wages at the time of enrollment, which explains why there was only a positive difference for them.

The argument for the first interpretation is that the primary constraint in this analysis is the insufficient data available to account for potential differences between participants and the comparison group, particularly for those without reported earnings in Q0. It is likely there are differences between the two groups — the decision to enroll or not to enroll in services is a strong indicator that such differences exist. Moreover, the reliability of the results is further compromised by the fact that the analysis cannot adjust for differences in earnings between participants and the comparison group for the subgroup without earnings in Q0.

With respect to the second interpretation, there is mixed evidence that the program was more able to help the subgroup without reported earnings in Q0. The employment outcomes of participants and comparison group members without reported earnings in Q0 start to diverge almost immediately and stay diverged. Figure 4.2 shows that both the earnings and employment of participants start to diverge from those of the comparison group, in absolute terms, immediately in Q1 and Q2, and diverge more in Q4, before becoming steady throughout the follow-up period. It is possible that the program had such an immediate effect, since, as described in the previous chapter, the most heavily used services were those associated to achieving quick employment. Additionally, the median participant enrolled in a transitional job or job-skills training just over two months after referral.

The measures of service use, though, do not paint a clear picture that services would have such an immediate effect on employment outcomes. Only about one-third of the INVEST participants began any of the training components — a transitional job or skill-building training (see Table 3.3). The participants who enrolled in a training component do have higher earnings and employment rates in the follow-up period than those who did not, but the difference is not nearly enough to explain the difference between participants and the comparison group (not shown). It may be the case, however, that the program's other components that were highly used by participants — career services provided by staff members to all participants, career services individually tailored to participants' needs, and support services (used by 89 percent, 81 percent, and 44 percent of participants, respectively) — were enough to help participants improve their employment outcomes, given the low earnings of this population in the absence of the program. Among the comparison group without reported earnings in

Q0, about one-quarter were employed during each of the follow-up period quarters, and average earnings ranged between \$1,070 and \$1,320 in those quarters (not shown).⁸

8. For context, a living wage calculator published by Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers estimates that a single, childless adult in 2025 needs to make around \$3,900 per calendar quarter to be above poverty (estimated using federal poverty guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and about four times that much to make a living wage (defined as what people must earn to “help cover the cost of their family’s minimum basic needs where they live while still being self-sufficient”). Glasmeier (2025).

5

INVEST Program Criminal Legal Outcomes

- About three-quarters of INVEST clients avoided any arrest in the year after starting the program.
- INVEST clients were slightly more successful in avoiding involvement in the criminal legal system than a similar group analyzed in a separate MDRC study of criminal legal outcomes in Los Angeles County.

The INVEST program envisioned that as a result of improvement in employment outcomes, the program’s participants would be less likely to be involved in the criminal legal system.¹ Due to the sensitive nature of the data, the data sets describing involvement in the legal system could not be linked to earnings data, which meant the study could not examine the link between employment outcomes and legal system outcomes. Additionally, data for involvement in the criminal legal system were only available for people enrolled in INVEST and not for people who were referred but did not enroll. As a result, this chapter presents results of the study’s outcome measures only for INVEST participants. For context, it also presents the same outcome measures for a similar population studied in another MDRC study of a program in Los Angeles County that served people on probation.

Measures of involvement in the criminal legal system, shown in Table 5.1, are calculated for the one-year period after the client enrolled in the program.² They measure whether participants avoided arrest, incarceration, or a revocation of probation during this year.³

1. Nally, Lockwood, Ho, and Knutson (2014).
2. Note that these outcomes use a different reference date than the employment outcomes. The enrollment date is used rather than the date of referral to the program, since only participants in the program are included in this analysis.
3. A probation revocation is a formal process handled through the court system. It begins with a complaint from a probation officer alleging that a person has violated the terms of probation. These violations include new arrests and breaches of probation rules. The outcome can result in additional jail time or continued probation, possibly with added conditions.

Table 5.1. Criminal Legal System Outcomes in the Year After Enrollment in INVEST, by Type of Probation

Outcome	All Clients	Standard Probation	AB 109 Probation
Arrests (%)			
Never arrested	75.2	78.3	64.9
Never arrested for a felony	80.2	83.4	69.5
Never arrested for a violent felony	95.7	96.6	92.1
Incarceration			
Never incarcerated in the year after enrollment (%)	76.2	78.8	67.2
Total days incarcerated (days)	86.0	84.7	92.1
Revocations of probation (%)			
No revocation	83.5	84.7	78.8
Sample	1,229	928	283

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on InfoHub data. See Appendix B for more on this data source.

NOTES: The sample consists of INVEST participants. It excludes 18 INVEST participants who had unknown AB109 statuses. Total days incarcerated is calculated only including sample members who were ever incarcerated in the year after enrollment. “Felony” and “violent felony” refer to the most serious charge associated with the arrest or conviction.

The study did not measure convictions as an outcome because a year is not enough time for some cases to be processed through the system. The table shows outcomes for participants on AB 109 Probation separately because, as described in Chapter 3, those on that type of probation demonstrate quite different characteristics. Previous literature has also shown that they have more extensive involvement in the legal system.⁴

Most INVEST participants had no involvement in the legal system in the year after enrolling in the program. Three-quarters (75 percent) of clients were not arrested and just about the same proportion (76 percent) were never incarcerated in this period. Additionally, 84 percent of clients did not have their probation revoked during this period. Clients who did become involved in the legal system tended to be incarcerated for felony charges. Of the one-quarter of clients who were incarcerated at any point during the year, they averaged 86 days in jail, which is almost a quarter of the year. Additionally, of clients who were arrested, 80 percent were charged with at least one felony, 18 percent with a violent felony (not shown).

There were stark differences in outcomes between participants on AB 109 Probation and on other types of standard probation. A lower share of those on AB 109 Probation avoided ar-

4. See Nguyen, Grattet, and Bird (2017).

rest (including for felonies and violent felonies), incarceration, and revocations of probation. This finding aligns with previous research that has shown that people on AB 109 Probation are more likely than those on other types of standard probation to have repeated contact with the legal system.⁵

This study does not have a comparison group, but for context, it may be useful to consider results from another published study conducted by MDRC about a program for people on probation in Los Angeles County.⁶ The Developing Opportunities and Offering Reentry Solutions Community Reentry Center, better known as DOORS, was intended to provide a wide range of services, including employment, to people who were referred by their probation officers.⁷ In that study, MDRC constructed a comparison group composed of people who were also on probation and who exhibited similar characteristics related to needs and involvement in the legal system but who were assigned to two other probation offices. The comparison offices were not located close to DOORS and therefore probation officers were not expected to refer their clients there.

This comparison group from the DOORS study provides some good context for the outcomes of INVEST participants. Both groups met with their probation officers regularly, and those officers could refer them to providers that served their needs. In both studies, eligible individuals could have — and be referred to services for — more than one type of need, and in both studies the most common need observed was related to employment. Very few clients in the DOORS comparison group probation offices enrolled in INVEST during the study period (about 2 percent across two probation offices, not shown). The two groups also demonstrated similar characteristics when they enrolled in their respective studies. Finally, the studies were conducted at similar time periods, with the DOORS study period taking place between July 2019 and June 2022.

Table 5.2 shows outcomes for the comparison group in the DOORS study alongside those of INVEST clients who were on standard probation.⁸ Those who enrolled in INVEST fared slightly better than the comparison group in the DOORS evaluation in each outcome measure. They were more likely to avoid any type of arrest, felony arrests, and revocation of probation in the year after enrollment.⁹ The study team decided not to compare confidence intervals or interpret statistical significance because no statistical tests were conducted to ensure the two groups were similar when they enrolled in the study.

5. As an example, see Nguyen, Grattet, and Bird (2017).

6. Weinberger, Armenta, and Nicoletti (2025).

7. In fact, the most common program referrals to DOORS were related to employment.

8. Fewer than 3 percent of the people in the sample from the DOORS study were on AB 109 Probation. For more information on baseline characteristics of the DOORS comparison group, see Appendix Table A.3 in Weinberger, Armenta, and Schwartz (2025).

9. Both groups are expected to be on probationary supervision, on average, for the same amount of time in the year after enrollment because they were referred to their respective programs at similar times during their probation.

Table 5.2. Involvement in the Criminal Legal System Among INVEST Participants and the DOORS Study Comparison Group

Study	Never Arrested	Never Arrested for a Felony	Never Had Probation Revoked
INVEST study	78.3	83.4	84.7
DOORS study	73.5	76.3	80.3

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on InfoHub data and Weinberger, Armenta, and Nicoletti (2025). See Appendix B for more on the InfoHub data source.

NOTES: INVEST study outcomes in this table do not include people on AB 109 Probation because the comparison sample from the DOORS study included almost no one on AB 109 Probation. Only outcomes that were also available in the DOORS study are presented in this table. Outcomes from the comparison group in the DOORS study are used. The DOORS study constructed that comparison group by matching people on probation in non-DOORS offices who would otherwise have had similar likelihoods of participating in DOORS. DOORS served people with needs such as employment, so this comparison group had needs similar to those of INVEST participants. Individuals chosen for the sample in the DOORS study were on probationary supervision at some point between July 2019 and June 2022, and the outcomes presented in this table cover the year after the date that was estimated as the baseline.

6

Conclusions

INVEST was largely implemented as intended. The Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training gave program staff members an improved understanding of the needs of people on probation and the barriers they face. The combination of shared training and shared space was critical in fostering successful collaboration between staff members from Probation and America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs). Staff members and clients alike described the availability of flexible funding for supportive services as one of the most beneficial program components.

However, while the program was implemented as intended, client participation in services fell short. Most clients participated in career services individually tailored to their needs, yet fewer than one-third participated in any of the workshops offered. Furthermore, just over one-third of clients enrolled in any training. The time commitment required and need for immediate employment may have deterred many clients from taking full advantage of the services available.

Data limitations make it difficult to assess whether the INVEST program is a promising approach. One subgroup did have employment outcomes that were better than those of a comparison group: The subgroup without reported earnings in the quarter when they enrolled in INVEST had higher earnings and were more likely to be employed between one and two years after enrollment than similar comparison group who were referred to INVEST but did not enroll. However, this comparison group is not a strong one, because it is likely to be different from the group that did enroll in INVEST. In the absence of a strong comparison group, it is not possible to know whether to attribute improvements in these individuals' outcomes to the INVEST program or to differences that existed between the participant and comparison group that the study could not adjust for. Future research using a more rigorous study design could help to determine the program's effects on employment and earnings, and could also collect information on its effects on outcomes related to involvement in the criminal legal system.

The fact that the study did find different results between people who did and did not have earnings in the quarter when they enrolled in INVEST suggests that as currently designed, INVEST may not be equally effective for everyone on probation. People who are not working when they enroll may benefit more from a program such as INVEST that provides immediate

services in addition to training and workshops. But again, data limitations make it impossible to be confident whether INVEST is working better for some people than others. A more rigorous study could also show more clearly whom the program helps the most and what mechanisms promote improved outcomes.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Interviews with program staff members and participants suggested ways some program components could be improved. While INVEST offered more flexible funding than is typical in workforce development programs, it still may not have been enough for clients to sustain themselves (and sometimes their families) while they were engaged in training or looking for work. Their need for immediate employment was great. Aligning financial support more closely with the local cost of living could help address the financial burdens of not working while engaging in program services and might allow more clients to participate in program services beyond looking for immediate employment.

Additional consultations with people eligible for the program could strengthen program planning and research efforts. For example, potential program participants could provide valuable ideas about services and how they could be better tailored to meet their needs or how to better engage participants in the services available. Potential program participants could also advise researchers about what questions to ask or what to make of the findings.

Finally, it may be possible to apply Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training more broadly, to support other novel collaborations between agencies that serve populations with a history of involvement in the criminal legal system. For example, a recent demonstration project that focused on employment for over 10,000 parents required to pay child support revealed that nearly 70 percent of these parents had a history of involvement with the criminal legal system, and research has shown that unemployment or lack of consistent employment are major reasons why people do not pay their required child support.¹ Inclusive Workforce Development Specialist training could perhaps foster effective collaboration between child support agencies and local workforce agencies or other employment service providers, with the goal of improving employment and earnings for parents and ultimately improving child support payments.

1. Skemer (2024); Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2018).

APPENDIX

A

Supplementary Tables

Appendix Table A.1. INVEST Locations

Location
Palmdale America’s Job Center of California
East Los Angeles/West San Gabriel Valley America’s Job Center of California
Rancho Dominguez Comprehensive America’s Job Center of California
Rio Hondo Comprehensive America’s Job Center of California
South-Bas America’s Job Center of California/Inglewood One Stop
South Los Angeles America’s Job Center of California/Southwest College Campus
Vernon Central Worksource
Long Beach Pacific Gateway
Northeast San Fernando Valley Comprehensive America’s Job Center of California
Pomona Valle America’s Job Center of California

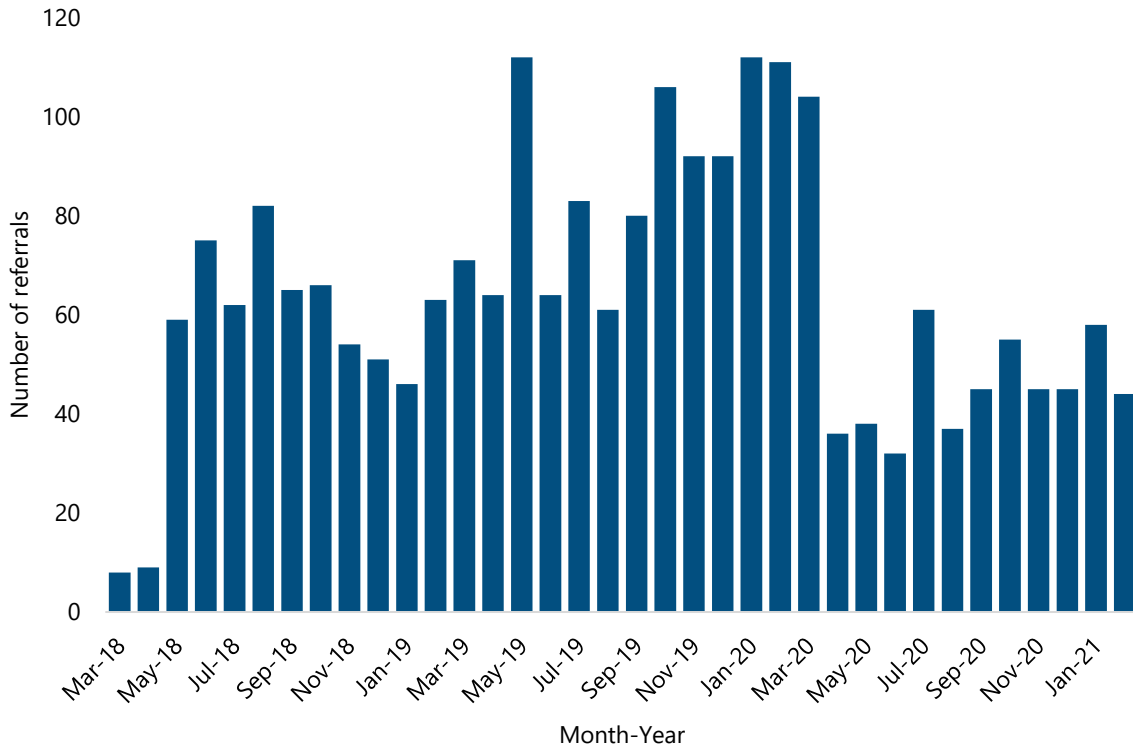
Appendix Table A.2. Involvement of INVEST Clients in the Criminal Legal System from Two to Five Years Before Enrollment, by Type of Probation

Characteristic	All clients	Standard Probation	AB 109 Probation
Arrests 2-5 years before enrollment (%)			
Never arrested	34.6	37.5	23.3
Never arrested for a felony	41.3	45.2	28.0
Never arrested for a violent felony	84.9	84.2	86.9
Convictions 2-5 years before enrollment (%)			
Never convicted	38.6	42.0	25.1
Never convicted of a felony	55.6	60.0	40.8
Never convicted of a violent felony	90.6	90.3	91.5
Sample size	1,232	928	283

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on CalJOBS, ARS, and Infohub data. See Appendix B for more on these data sources.

NOTES: The sample sizes for the standard and AB 109 Probation groups do not add to 1,232 due to a few people missing information on their AB 109 statuses. “Felony” and “violent felony” refer to the most serious charge associated with an arrest or conviction. Dates of conviction are based on the filing date associated with the court case that includes the charge for which a person was convicted.

Appendix Figure A.1. Monthly Referrals to INVEST



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on ARS data. See Appendix B for more on this data source.

NOTES: Includes all referrals made to INVEST between March 1, 2018, and February 28, 2021, both participants and individuals who did not enroll. If someone was referred more than once, only the first referral is counted. A total of 2,288 referrals are represented in the figure.

APPENDIX

B

Analysis Data and Methods

DATA SOURCES

Semistructured Interviews with Staff Members and Clients

The evaluation team worked with INVEST program leaders to select a sample of America's Job Centers of California (AJCC) locations at which to conduct semistructured interviews.¹ The selection of locations was based on diversity in geographic location (densely populated urban centers and suburban locations), numbers of clients enrolled, and variation of services. Ultimately, a sample of 6 INVEST AJCC locations (of 10 possible locations) was selected for staff and client interviews. All interviews took place between June and August of 2022. Interviews were conducted with 15 INVEST staff members in the roles of deputy probation officer, business services representative, and career development specialist. The team also interviewed five leaders with the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation), Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), and the Reentry Division within the Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry.

The research team interviewed 14 clients. INVEST staff members asked clients whether they were willing to participate in interviews. Those who said yes and who were interviewed tended to be more engaged with the program than the average client, and information from those interviews is not representative of the larger study sample.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The files were imported into Dedoose, a web-based, mixed-methods analysis software package, and were coded systematically in a multistep process. Program staff and program client transcripts were analyzed separately. The development of the coding scheme involved two stages. First, structural codes were created based on the topics that were included in most interviews (that is, following the semistructured interview protocols). More detailed coding within each structural code followed, including coding for emerging topics. This process was iterative; some codes were identified in advance, and some were developed during the process to accommodate new and emerging themes.

Staff Survey in 2022

A voluntary staff survey was sent to all INVEST deputy probation officers and AJCC staff members at all 10 INVEST locations (a total of 29 people) in October and November of 2022. A total of 23 staff members responded, so the results may not be representative. The response rate may affect results. The survey asked about client service use, staff shared space and collaboration, staff training and support, and program effectiveness. The research team analyzed survey data alongside the interview data to provide additional context and support to findings.

1. In a semistructured interview, the interviewer asks the interviewee open-ended questions from a protocol/list of formal questions that align with the research questions.

Automated Referral System (ARS)

The ARS system maintained by the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity contains information on all referrals made to INVEST from probation offices. It includes the date each individual was referred, whether the individual enrolled and participated in INVEST services, and a few pieces of demographic information about the person being referred.

CalJOBS

The INVEST program used this AJCC administrative data system to capture information on career services provided, referrals made, incentives paid, training enrollment and completion, transitional jobs, and exit dates. It also provides demographic information for program participants.

Employment Development Department (EDD)

Data from California's unemployment insurance data system, EDD, were obtained for all people referred to INVEST who had valid Social Security numbers. The data include all earnings associated with an individual (from all jobs that report earnings to the state) for a set of calendar quarters, based on a reference date. The quarterly data provided are based on the referral date, with the first quarter being the calendar quarter in which the individual was referred to INVEST.

InfoHub

The InfoHub data system was used to create measures of involvement with the criminal system for INVEST clients. The Los Angeles County Chief Information Office oversees InfoHub; it is an administrative data repository that combines people's data related to the criminal legal system with other administrative data from various county agencies, linking the data of each individual across all of them. The Chief Information Office provided deidentified data to MDRC from the County Sheriff's Department, the Superior Court, and the Department of Probation.

EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

Study Sample

The employment analysis uses a different sample than the implementation analysis described in Chapter 3. The employment analysis sample includes INVEST clients, or "participants," described in the implementation study in addition to a comparison group who were referred but did not enroll in INVEST services. Appendix Table B.1 describes how the analysis sample for the employment analysis was constructed. The sample starts with all individuals who were referred to INVEST in the study period according to the ARS data system. The study could

Appendix Table B.1. Sample Size in the Employment Analysis and All Exclusions Made Due to Data Considerations

Number of Records Remaining in the ARS Sample	Number of Records Excluded	Reason for Exclusion
4,430	-	-
3,612	818	Drop records without a Social Security number. All records dropped were in the pool of the comparison group.
2,757	855	Cut duplicate records for individuals referred to the program more than once.
2,626	131	For duplicate records in ARS where one record has a participant status of “Yes” and the other has a status of “No” (meaning the person participated on one referral but not the other), include only the record with a “Yes” status. For duplicate records where one record has a “gender” value and the other is missing a value, include only the record with the nonmissing “gender” value if all else is equal.
2,601	25	Exclude records that meet the following conditions: (1) has a service date in CalJOBS before the program referral date in ARS and (2) service date is from a different calendar quarter than the referral quarter.
2,288	313	Exclude any persons labeled as participants in ARS data who are not in CalJOBS data.

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using ARS, EDD, and CalJOBS data.

NOTES: The starting sample of 4,430 comes from the ARS data system and includes all people referred to INVEST (participants and the comparison group). Each row describes a decision that reduced the total sample for the employment analysis. As a result of the sample exclusions, the final sample of participants in the analysis is not the same as the number of INVEST clients included in the implementation study (there are 1,172 participants in the sample of 2,288 for the employment analysis, compared with 1,232 participants in the implementation study).

only link employment data for individuals with a valid Social Security number in the data system, so individuals without a valid number were dropped from the analysis.² Additionally, the ARS data include all referrals and thus may include the same individual multiple times, so the study team used specific rules to decide how to keep only one referral per individual in the sample. Finally, any individuals who were labeled as participants in the referral data but did not appear in the CalJOBS data were also removed from the analysis.

Employment Data for Analysis

Employment outcome measures were constructed using quarterly earnings data. As described in Figure 4.1 of the main text, the quarterly data extend from the calendar quarter in which each individual was referred to the program through two years after the referral was made, split into two separate periods in relation to when the individual was referred.³ The first period, the “program period,” includes the quarter in which the individual was referred (the “baseline quarter” or Q0) and the two subsequent quarters (Q1 and Q2). Next, the data are available for the “follow-up period,” each of four quarters that start in the fourth calendar quarter after the baseline quarter (Q4 through Q7).⁴

The quarterly earnings data include earnings from all jobs reported to the state in each quarter in the sample period. Information on hours worked in each job are not included in the data.

Apart from the earnings data, the study had access to very limited information about people in the sample at the time of referral. The data are limited to gender, age, and date of program referral, as well as whether the person had an active AB 109 Probation case.

Description of the Analysis Comparing INVEST Participants with the Comparison Group

The goal of the analysis is to estimate the effect of the program by comparing outcomes of INVEST participants with those of a comparison group. An ideal comparison group would include individuals who share common demographic characteristics with INVEST participants, except that they did not receive INVEST services. For the current study, the comparison group comprises individuals referred to INVEST who did not enroll, which means they probably differ from INVEST participants in some way that is unknown to the study team. The following

-
2. All participants during the study period had a valid Social Security number but not all nonparticipants did. The study team found that nonparticipants with and without valid Social Security numbers were similar with respect to all characteristics available in the data.
 3. Quarterly earnings data are based on the calendar quarter. The referral date could be at any point in the calendar quarter. For example, the data for an individual referred on January 20, 2020, would start with earnings from the first calendar quarter of 2020 (January through March).
 4. For example, for an individual referred on January 20, 2020, earnings data are available starting the calendar quarter from January 1, 2020, through March 31, 2020. Q1 would be made up of earnings between April 1, 2020, through June 30, 2020, and Q4 would be made up of earnings between January 1, 2021, and March 31, 2021.

section describes the formal regression analysis the study team conducted to adjust for the likely differences and explains limitations in this analysis.

The analysis was restricted by the baseline characteristics available for the study to adjust for possible differences between the program and comparison group statistically. The measures available can be split into two categories: employment measures at enrollment and demographics. Based on the data available, the baseline employment measures were whether one had reported earnings in the baseline quarter and one's total earnings for that quarter.

Appendix Table B.2 compares the INVEST participants and comparison group based on the available measures. The limited data also make it difficult to assess how similar the participants and comparison group were at the time of referral. Nevertheless, the data do show a few notable differences between the two groups. One, the participant group is older, with a lower share of individuals in the 18-24 age group and more ages 35 and over. Second, participants were more likely to have a case under AB 109 Probation. The two groups are similar in their gender distribution and have similar baseline employment measures.

Appendix Table B.2. Characteristics of INVEST Participants and Comparison Group Members Included in the Employment Analysis

Characteristic	INVEST Participants	Comparison Group	Difference	P-Value
Gender (%)				
Female	23.6	22.9	0.7	0.694
Male	76.4	77.1	-0.7	0.694
Age (%)				
18-24	20.0	30.8	-10.8	<0.001
25-34	38.3	38.8	-0.5	0.81
35-44	23.9	20.0	3.9	0.024
45 or more	17.8	10.4	7.4	<0.001
AB 109 Probation (%)	24.1	18.6	5.5	0.001
Reported earnings in Q0 (%)	27.7	28.1	-0.4	0.829
Quarterly earnings in Q0 (\$)	851.7	885.0	-33.3	0.784
Quarterly earnings in Q0 among those with reported earnings (\$)	3,071.4	3,145.5	-71.1	0.846
Sample size	1,172	1,116		

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using ARS and EDD data.

NOTES: The sample for this table includes INVEST participants and comparison group members before adjusting for characteristics in the baseline period. AB 109 Probation refers to individuals whose active probation cases linked to their INVEST referrals were identified as AB 109. Q0 refers to the calendar quarter in which the individual was referred to INVEST.

The lack of available data had a couple of important consequences for the analysis. First, the study was limited by not having earnings data before the baseline quarter with which to establish any prereferral trends. An additional complication was that only 28 percent of the analysis sample had any earnings in the baseline quarter, which meant most of the sample had the same earnings (\$0), limiting how useful earnings could be in adjusting for that characteristic in the analysis. Finally, the study had access to very few characteristics about individuals in the analysis sample that could proxy for employment prospects: age and gender. Two other measures specific to this study sample — whether someone had AB 109 Probation status and the date of referral — were also used because these measures were likely to be correlated with employment prospects. As shown in Table 3.1 in the main text, people on AB 109 Probation were more likely to have reported earnings in Q0. And in general, employment prospects vary over time, even more so in this study because it coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

To account for the lack of variability in earnings for the unemployed sample, the analysis was conducted separately for individuals in the sample who had reported earnings in the baseline quarter and those who did not. These results were also pooled to get an overall estimate. For those who had reported earnings in the baseline quarter, a propensity score matching method was used to match participants and members of the comparison group with similar baseline earnings and demographics, before adjusting for those characteristics in a regression. For the subgroup without earnings, the analysis could only use a linear regression that adjusted for the available baseline characteristics.

The study team also examined whether defining the baseline as incorporating both Q0 and Q1 affected the results. In this analysis, anyone with earnings in either Q0 or Q1 was considered as having baseline reported earnings, and earnings information from both quarters was used in the matching and regression. Doing so increased the share of people in the study with reported baseline earnings, which increased the sample for the analysis that had more information and was able to use the propensity score. The argument for including Q1 in the baseline is that most participants would still be receiving services during this period, and so one would not expect outcomes to be affected by adding Q1 to the baseline. The results were very similar using this method.

For the subgroup with reported earnings in the baseline quarter, the analysis used propensity score matching to match each participant to an individual in the comparison group. For this method, a logistic regression is used to model the probability of participating in the program based on baseline characteristics, and then each participant is matched to someone in the comparison group with a similar predicted propensity to have enrolled in the program. To conduct the match based on the propensity score, the analysis uses a one-to-one match with a caliper of 0.2. The measures used in the regression were the demographic measures described above and earnings in the baseline quarter.

For the regression analysis, the study uses three outcome measures: total earnings in the follow-up period, whether one was ever employed in this period, and the total number of

quarters one was employed in this period.⁵ The follow-up period is the quarters Q4 through Q7. This period starts about a year after referral to the program, at which point most participants had exited the program (78 percent of participants exited the program within 12 months).

Results of the Analysis Comparing INVEST Participants with the Comparison Group

Appendix Table B.3 shows the results of the three employment-outcome analyses, which are consistent with the raw values shown in Figure 4.2 in the main text. The first two panels show the results of the subgroups with reported earnings and without reported earnings during the baseline quarter, respectively, and the third panel shows the results of the pooled sample. The results show that there was a statistically significant, positive effect on employment outcomes for the INVEST participant group compared with the comparison group, and this effect entirely reflects the subgroup without earnings in the baseline quarter. For this subgroup, there was a difference of just over \$2,500 in earnings for the year that makes up Q4 through Q7 (approximately the period of one to two years after referral). Participants in this subgroup were also almost 14 percentage points more likely to work in this period and worked 0.4 more quarters (a little over a month more) than the comparison group.

5. The earnings measure was constructed by summing earnings from all employers in the calendar quarter and summing all quarters. Individuals were considered employed during the follow-up period if they had nonzero earnings at any time during the period.

Appendix Table B.3. Regression-Adjusted Differences in Employment Outcomes, by Reported Earnings

Employment Outcome	Program Group	Comparison Group	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Reported earnings sample				
Total earnings in the follow-up period (\$)	12,703	12,560	143	0.921
Ever employed in the follow-up period (%)	69.3	63.0	6.4	0.091
Total quarters employed in the follow-up period	2.03	1.89	0.14	0.303
Sample size (total = 584)	292	292		
No reported earnings sample				
Total earnings in the follow-up period (\$)	6,840	4,285	2,555	<0.001***
Ever employed in the follow-up period (%)	52.5	38.9	13.6	<0.001***
Total quarters employed in the follow-up period	1.37	0.95	0.42	<0.001***
Sample size (total = 1,649)	847	802		
Pooled sample				
Total earnings in the follow-up period (\$)	8,330	6,399	1,931	0.005***
Ever employed in the follow-up period (%)	57.0	45.2	11.7	<0.001***
Total quarters employed in the follow-up period	1.54	1.2	0.34	<0.001***
Sample size (total = 2,233)	1,139	1,094		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on CalJOBS, ARS, and EDD data.

NOTES: Group means and the estimated differences in outcomes are presented regression-adjusted, controlling for characteristics before referral to INVEST. For the subgroup without reported earnings, the regression includes just demographic measures. For those with earnings during the calendar quarter in which they were referred to the program, it also includes earnings during the baseline quarter (Q0). The “reported earnings” group is composed of individuals with any earnings in the baseline quarter and the “no reported earnings” group is composed of individuals with zero earnings in that quarter. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated difference would have been generated by a program with no true effect.

REFERENCES

- Cancian, Maria, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert Wood. 2018. *Final Implementation Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) Evaluation*. Institute for Research on Poverty.
- California Civil Rights Department. 2022. "Fair Chance Act: Criminal History and Employment." California Civil Rights Department. Available at: https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2022/11/Fair-Chance-Act-FAQ_ENG.pdf.
- Cowan, Jill. 2021. "A Timeline of the Coronavirus in California." *New York Times* (June 15). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/15/us/coronavirus-california-timeline.html>.
- Cummings, Danielle, and Dan Bloom. 2020. *Can Subsidized Employment Programs Help Disadvantaged Job Seekers? A Synthesis of Findings from Evaluations of 13 Programs*. MDRC.
- Fraser, Jay. 2017. *Report on the California Community Corrections Performance Incentives Act of 2009: Findings from the SB 678 Program*. Judicial Council of California.
- Glasmeier, Amy K. 2025. "Living Wage Calculator." Website: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/06037>.
- Nally, John M., Susan Lockwood, Taiping Ho, and Katie Knutson. 2014. "Post-Release Recidivism and Employment Among Different Types of Released Offenders: A 5-Year Follow-Up Study in the United States." *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 9, 1: 16–34.
- National Institute of Corrections. 2011. *Administrative Guide: Offender Workforce Development Specialist Partnership Training Program*. National Institute of Corrections.
- Nguyen, Viet, Ryken Grattet, and Mia Bird. 2017. *California Probation in the Era of Reform*. Public Policy Institute of California.
- Shanshory, Sophie. 2023. "Supporting the Employment Goals of Individuals on Probation: Supportive Services in the Los Angeles County Innovative Employment Solutions Program." MDRC.
- Skemer, Melanie. 2023. *Testing a New Approach to Addressing Nonpayment of Child Support: Effects of the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration*. MDRC.
- Weinberger, Gabriel, Raul Armenta, and Elisa Nicoletti. 2025. *Facilitating Access to Supportive Services for Adults on Probation: A Review of the DOORS Program*. MDRC.
- Weinberger, Gabriel, Raul Armenta, and Megan Schwartz. 2025. *Facilitating Access to Supportive Services for Adults on Probation: A Review of the DOORS Program. Supplement A*. MDRC.
- Widra, Emily, and Alexi Jones. 2023. "Mortality, Health, and Poverty: The Unmet Needs of People on Probation and Parole." *Prison Policy Initiative* (blog), April. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/04/03/nsduh_probation_parole/.

EARLIER MDRC PUBLICATIONS ON THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY REENTRY INTEGRATED SERVICES PROJECT

The Youth Overcoming! Program

*An Intervention to Reduce Incarceration and
Reincarceration Among Young Adults*

2025. Raul Armenta

A Promising Approach to Coordinated Community-Based Reentry Services

2023. Michelle Manno, Ann Bickerton, Bret
Barden, Niko Leiva, and Megan Schwartz

Facilitating Access to Supportive Services for Adults on Probation

A Review of the DOORS Program

2025. Gabriel Weinberger, Raul Armenta, and
Elisa Nicoletti.

Supporting the Employment Goals of Individuals on Probation

*Supportive Services in the Los Angeles
County Innovative Employment Solutions
Program*

2023. Sophie Shanshory

The Costs and Benefits of the Reentry Intensive Case Management Services Program

*A Program of the Los Angeles County Justice,
Care and Opportunities Department*

2024. Louisa Treskon and Anna Kyler

Not Just a Job: A Career

*Implementation of a Sectoral Training
Program for People Impacted by the Criminal
Legal System*

2023. Emily Brennan, Chelsea Jackson, and Anna
Kyler

We'll Get It Done Together

*How Community Health Workers Support
RICMS Clients with Reentry*

2023. Niko Leiva and Osvaldo Avila

“Meet Them Where They’re At”

*How Community Health Workers Help
Navigate Reentry*

2022. Ann Bickerton, Sara Ellis, and Emmi Obara

NOTE: All MDRC publications are available for free download at www.mdrc.org.

ABOUT MDRC

MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization, is committed to finding solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing the nation. We aim to reduce poverty and bolster economic mobility; improve early child development, public education, and pathways from high school to college completion and careers; and reduce inequities in the criminal justice system. Our partners include public agencies and school systems, nonprofit and community-based organizations, private philanthropies, and others who are creating opportunity for individuals, families, and communities.

Founded in 1974, MDRC builds and applies evidence about changes in policy and practice that can improve the well-being of people who are economically disadvantaged. In service of this goal, we work alongside our programmatic partners and the people they serve to identify and design more effective and equitable approaches. We work with them to strengthen the impact of those approaches. And we work with them to evaluate policies or practices using the highest research standards. Our staff members have an unusual combination of research and organizational experience, with expertise in the latest qualitative and quantitative research methods, data science, behavioral science, culturally responsive practices, and collaborative design and program improvement processes. To disseminate what we learn, we actively engage with policymakers, practitioners, public and private funders, and others to apply the best evidence available to the decisions they are making.

MDRC works in almost every state and all the nation's largest cities, with offices in New York City; Oakland, California; and Washington, DC.