

Executive Summary

striving for independence

TWO-YEAR IMPACT
FINDINGS FROM THE
YOUTH VILLAGES
TRANSITIONAL LIVING
EVALUATION

Melanie Skemer
Erin Jacobs Valentine

November 2016



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Overview

Young adults with histories of foster care or juvenile justice custody often experience poor outcomes across a number of domains, on average, relative to their peers. While government funding for services targeting these groups of young people has increased in recent years, research on the effectiveness of such services is limited, and few of the programs that have been rigorously tested have been found to improve outcomes.

The Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation tested whether the Transitional Living program, operated by the social service organization Youth Villages, makes a difference in the lives of young men and women with histories of foster care or juvenile justice custody. The program, which was renamed “YVLifeSet” in April 2015, is intended to help these young people make a successful transition to adulthood by providing intensive, individualized, and clinically focused case management, support, and counseling.

The evaluation used a rigorous random assignment design and was set in Tennessee, where Youth Villages operates its largest Transitional Living program. From October 2010 to October 2012, more than 1,300 young people were assigned, at random, to either a program group, which was offered the Transitional Living program’s services, or to a control group, which was not offered those services. Using survey and administrative data, the evaluation team measured outcomes for both groups over time to assess whether Transitional Living services led to better outcomes for the program group compared with the control group’s outcomes.

This is the third major report in the evaluation. The first report provides a detailed description of the Transitional Living program model and assesses its implementation. The second report assesses whether the program improved key outcomes during the first year after young people were enrolled in the study. That report relies largely on survey data to analyze the program’s impacts in the six domains that it was designed to affect: education; employment and earnings; housing stability and economic well-being; social support; health and safety; and criminal involvement. This third report uses administrative data to assess the program’s impacts in three of the original six domains — education; employment and earnings; and criminal involvement — during the second year after study enrollment. Taken together, the one- and two-year results show that participation in the Transitional Living program had modest, positive impacts on a broad range of outcomes. The program boosted earnings, increased housing stability and economic well-being, and improved some outcomes related to health and safety. However, it did not improve outcomes in the areas of education, social support, or criminal involvement.

These results indicate that the Transitional Living program can improve multiple outcomes for young adults with histories of foster care or juvenile justice custody, a notable finding given how few other programs that serve these populations have been shown to have an effect. As a next step, Youth Villages aims to build on the areas where the program has already been successful by testing modifications to the YVLifeSet model; the hope is that such modifications will further improve young people’s outcomes, particularly in domains where the program has not yet produced positive impacts.

Preface

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a critical and often challenging time, especially for young people who have been in the foster care or juvenile justice system. These individuals face difficulties that are much less common among their peers with no history of state custody, such as low levels of education, minimal formal work history, mental health and substance abuse problems, weak social support, extreme poverty, and housing instability. While others their age frequently get help from their parents well into their twenties, young people who are leaving state custody tend to have relatively little financial, emotional, or social support. Moreover, many of them suffer from the lingering effects of childhood trauma and the inadequacies of the government systems that acted as their guardians. Given such circumstances, it is not surprising that these young people often struggle in many areas as they enter adulthood.

One program designed to help them is the YVLifeSet program — formerly the Youth Villages Transitional Living program — which offers intensive case management, support, and counseling on issues related to housing, employment, education, life skills, and behavioral health to young people who were formerly in foster care or juvenile justice custody. Taken together, the one- and two-year results of the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation, conducted in the state of Tennessee, show that the program can make positive differences in the lives of young adults who were in foster care or juvenile justice custody as teenagers. The young people who were offered the program’s services had improved earnings, experienced less homelessness and material hardship, and had better mental health than those who were not offered its services. However, while the program helped to stabilize many of its participants as they made the transition to adulthood, it did not have an impact on longer-term outcomes, such as educational attainment.

As an organization committed to continuous learning and program improvement, Youth Villages is working to strengthen the YVLifeSet model by testing new strategies to enhance its positive effects on the young people it serves — using risk assessments to better tailor services to participants, increasing efforts to help young people who are at high risk of criminal justice involvement, and ramping up its technological capabilities to improve data collection and service delivery.

Given its early success, it is critical that we continue to learn with the YVLifeSet program as it expands to additional states and implements program improvement strategies and other services for young people who lack strong family supports and life skills.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

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This report would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and organizations. In particular, the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation and the production of this report were funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We would also like to thank Mark Courtney (University of Chicago) for his central role as MDRC's research partner throughout this evaluation.

We are tremendously grateful to several individuals on the staff at Youth Villages, including Sarah Hurley, Melanie Manns, Tim Goldsmith, Kristin Landers, and Pat Lawler, with whom we enjoyed a productive collaboration throughout this project. Sarah Hurley, Tim Goldsmith, and Kristin Landers carefully reviewed earlier drafts of the report and provided insightful feedback. Sarah Hurley also worked closely with MDRC to conceptualize and launch the evaluation, facilitate our communication with staff at Youth Villages and partner agencies, supply program participation data, and provide feedback at every stage of the research, among many other efforts that made this evaluation possible. Kristin Landers met with MDRC staff to help us understand the Transitional Living model and interpret program data and procedures. Melanie Manns monitored study enrollment, tracked participant samples, organized study paperwork for MDRC, and generally kept track of research activities onsite.

We accessed employment and earnings data with the help of Carl Attkisson at the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

At MDRC, John Martinez developed this project from the beginning and was the project director throughout. Sara Muller-Ravett and Joseph Broadus made sure random assignment and onsite operations went smoothly. John Martinez, Dan Bloom, Virginia Knox, Michelle Manno, Chuck Michalopoulos, Alice Tufel, and Mark Courtney provided thoughtful comments on several drafts of this report. Michelle Manno and Julianna Alson conducted the implementation research. Brit Henderson processed the postsecondary education and criminal justice data used in this report, while Danielle Cummings processed the employment and earnings data and conducted the impact analysis. Timothy Rudd, Yana Kusayeva, and David H. Greenberg (University of Maryland, Baltimore County) completed the cost analysis for the project. Dannia Guzman coordinated the production of the report. Carole Campbell edited the report, and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication.

We are especially grateful to the young people who participated in the study. They enthusiastically participated in surveys, interviews, and focus groups and allowed us to learn from their experiences. Many of the study participants were excited to help provide knowledge that could lead to better services for other young people in similar situations. We hope that this report will fulfill that wish.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Large numbers of young people in the United States were in foster care or in juvenile justice custody as teenagers, and many of them have a difficult time making a successful transition to independent adulthood as they leave these systems. Most of them faced a number of disadvantages during childhood and often have poor outcomes across several domains relative to their peers as they become adults. While government funding to help these groups has increased, few of the programs that have been rigorously evaluated have been found to improve outcomes.

To advance knowledge in this area, the Youth Villages program sought an independent evaluation of its Transitional Living program — now known as “YVLifeSet” — which is one example of an “independent living” program.¹ The Transitional Living program aims to help young men and women make the transition to adulthood by providing intensive, individualized, and clinically focused case management, support, and counseling. The evaluation used a rigorous random assignment design in which study sample members were assigned at random to either a program group that was offered the Transitional Living program services or to a control group that was not offered those services. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded the evaluation, which was led by MDRC in concert with Mark Courtney of the University of Chicago.

This third major report in the evaluation builds on the one-year findings and assesses the estimated two-year impacts of the Transitional Living program using administrative data for three outcome domains: education, employment and earnings, and criminal involvement. The report also presents information on the costs of operating the Transitional Living program.

Key findings overall and from the two-year analysis include:

- Transitional Living did not increase young people’s *average* earnings during the second year of follow-up, but it had a modest, positive effect at some earnings levels during this time period and it led to modest increases in employment and earnings over the full two-year study period.
- Statistically significant effects were not observed in Year 1 in the education, social support, and criminal involvement domains, and did not emerge in Year 2 (though social support was measured in Year 1 only).

¹The Transitional Living program was renamed “YVLifeSet” in April 2015. Because the name did not change until after the study period ended, this report refers to the program as “Transitional Living.”

- The program increased housing stability and economic well-being and improved some of the primary outcomes related to health and safety in Year 1, but data were not available to assess whether impacts in these domains continued into Year 2.

As noted above, this report does not include two-year results for three domains that were included in the one-year analysis — housing stability and economic well-being, social support, and health and safety — because administrative data for those domains do not exist, are difficult to obtain, or do not fully measure relevant outcomes. Therefore, this report provides only a partial picture of the two-year impacts of the Transitional Living program, particularly since the one-year analysis showed significant impacts on outcomes in two of the excluded domains.

Background and Policy Context

For those who have spent time in the foster care or juvenile justice system, or both, the transition from adolescence to adulthood can be particularly challenging. Such young people often contend with low levels of educational attainment, minimal formal work experience, mental health and substance use problems, weak social support, extreme poverty, and housing instability.

Recent federal legislation has increased the funding of services for young people who are aging out of foster care. The John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 gave states more funding to support independent living services, room and board, and Medicaid for young people in foster care up to age 21.² The subsequent Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 provided funding for states to extend foster care from age 18 through age 21 for eligible young people and to further expand independent living services. However, the availability and extent of these services vary widely by state depending on whether and how states choose to take advantage of federal funds.

Services for young people who are leaving juvenile justice placements have not been funded as consistently as services for those leaving foster care, though some young people who have been in juvenile justice custody are eligible for services funded by the Chafee and Fostering Connections acts. In addition, a general focus on “reentry” services for adults leaving prison and jail has led to federal funding to serve young people with a juvenile justice history.

²Medicaid provisions under the Chafee Act have now been superseded by those of the Affordable Care Act, under which all young people in foster care on their 18th birthday are eligible for Medicaid up to age 26.

The Transitional Living Program

The Transitional Living program is operated by Youth Villages, a nonprofit social service organization based in Memphis, Tennessee. The organization operates a variety of residential and community-based programs serving more than 20,000 young people each year in 12 states and the District of Columbia.

Transitional Living program services are expected to last an average of nine months. The program starts with assessments and the development of an individualized treatment plan that takes into account each participant's particular needs and goals. The bulk of the services are then provided during weekly, hour-long Transitional Living sessions with a "TL Specialist," who typically serves only eight young people at a time.

The content of the Transitional Living sessions varies depending on each participant's needs, but TL Specialists are expected to use evidence-informed tools, counseling, and action-oriented activities. Evidence-informed tools include specific curricula that cover topics like money management and job-seeking skills, as well as behavioral treatment strategies aimed at, for instance, helping participants overcome substance abuse problems. Counseling involves discussions between each participant and TL Specialist to address problems that may be impeding the young person's progress toward stated goals. Finally, TL Specialists use action-oriented activities, such as taking a participant to a bank to open an account or to a community college to gather information about classes.

In addition, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, a 12- to 20-week course of therapy offered by specially trained Youth Villages staff, is provided if it is clinically indicated. TL Specialists may also refer participants to other services in the community, such as General Educational Development (GED) classes, specialized mental health services, or housing services. TL Specialists have access to some flexible funds to support those who need money for expenses such as purchasing appropriate clothing for interviews or an apartment application fee. They also encourage young people to participate in monthly group social and learning activities with others in the program. Finally, educational/vocational coordinators are available to provide extra support to young people who want to go to college, take vocational training, or find a job.

The Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation

The Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation assessed the impacts of the Transitional Living program in Tennessee. The study sample includes men and women ages 18 to 24 who were living in Tennessee and who had left foster care or juvenile justice custody as teenagers or were aging out at 18. Between October 2010 and October 2012, 1,322 young people were assigned at random to either a program group, whose members were offered Transitional Living

program services, or a control group, whose members were not offered Transitional Living program services, but were provided with a list of other social service resources that were available in the community.

By measuring outcomes for both groups over time, the research team could assess whether Transitional Living services led to better outcomes for the program group. Owing to the random assignment design, the research groups were expected to be comparable on both measured and unmeasured characteristics when the study began. Therefore, statistically significant differences in outcomes that emerge between the two groups can be attributed with some confidence to the offer of Transitional Living services to the program group. These differences in outcomes are considered “impacts” or “effects” of the Transitional Living program.

Similar to other young people with histories of foster care or juvenile justice custody, those who enrolled in the study averaged relatively low levels of educational attainment and employment at study entry, while experiencing relatively high rates of arrest and housing instability. They are diverse in terms of gender and race: 48 percent of the sample are women, over 50 percent are white/non-Hispanic, and a substantial minority are black/non-Hispanic (37 percent). Finally, they come from varied custody backgrounds, with their first custody placement tending to occur in their teens. Sixty-one percent of the sample reported having been in custody because they had been neglected or abused (foster care), while 52 percent indicated that they had been in custody for delinquency (juvenile justice). About 13 percent of the study sample had experienced both types of custody.

Program Implementation and Service Receipt Differences Between the Two Research Groups

The Transitional Living program was implemented largely in accordance with the program model. A substantial portion of the program group received services at the expected average dosage (level and intensity) of the Transitional Living program model. About two-thirds participated in program services for at least five months and about half participated for at least nine months. Nearly all program group members participated in at least one Transitional Living session. While involved in the program, each individual participated in nearly one session per week, averaging over an hour per session. During these sessions, TL Specialists and participants covered a wide range of issues, with education, employment, and housing discussed most often.

Overall, there are large, statistically significant differences between the program and control groups in the dosage of the services they received. The program group was more likely than the control group to have had a case manager or social worker (75 percent compared with 44 percent) and to have met with that person at least once a week (60 percent compared with 20 percent). They were also more likely to have received help, from any source, with problems

related to education, employment, finances, housing, and daily living. However, while there was a clear difference in the level of services received, many control group members also obtained case management and other services.

One-Year Impacts of the Transitional Living Program

The primary source of outcome data for the one-year impact report is a survey that was administered by NORC at the University of Chicago to all sample members one year after they entered the study. Outcomes in six key domains were covered: education; employment and earnings; housing stability and economic well-being; social support; health and safety; and criminal involvement.

Statistically significant impacts on primary outcomes were detected in employment and earnings, housing stability and economic well-being, and health and safety. The program led to an increase of over \$600 in earnings in the year before the survey interview, driven, at least in part, by an increase in the percentage of young people who were employed. Program group members experienced significantly fewer types of housing instability than control group members, most notably reductions in homelessness and “couch surfing” (staying in someone else’s home temporarily when not having a permanent place to live). Similarly, the Transitional Living program reduced the incidence of economic hardship, driven by decreases in the percentage of those who did not have necessary clothing or shoes and in the percentage of young people who had delayed paying a bill in order to buy food. Finally, the program improved mental health and reduced the percentage of those involved in violent relationships. However, it did not significantly affect other key measures of health and safety, including substance use, condom use, and victimization. No statistically significant effects were found on primary outcomes in education, social support, and criminal involvement.

The research team also assessed differences in impacts across four sets of subgroup characteristics. In the one-year analysis, the research team found that the impacts of Transitional Living were consistent across these subgroups.

Overall, while the statistically significant impacts detected at one year proved modest, their breadth across several domains is consistent with the highly individualized nature of the program model, which is designed to address the wide variety of needs and circumstances of the young people it serves. The one-year impact findings were promising, especially given the lack of statistically significant, positive impacts for other programs targeting similar populations.

Two-Year Impacts

The two-year analysis estimates impacts in three domains: (1) education, using postsecondary enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse; (2) employment and earnings, using unemployment insurance data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development; and (3) criminal involvement, using arrest and conviction data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. For all three administrative data sources, the research team created Year 1, Year 2, and overall outcome measures and estimated impacts on these measures. With the exception of postsecondary enrollment data, Year 1 impacts on outcomes measured using administrative data were not assessed or presented in the one-year report.

Impacts on Education

As shown in Table ES.1, Transitional Living did not produce a statistically significant impact on the primary outcome in the education domain — enrollment in a postsecondary institution — either across the two years of follow-up or looking at each year individually. About one-fourth of both program and control group members enrolled in a postsecondary institution at some point in the two years following study enrollment; for both research groups, enrollment rates declined in Year 2 from the levels observed in Year 1.

Impacts on Employment and Earnings

No statistically significant differences between the program and control groups were observed in average total earnings when administrative data were used (Table ES.1). Total earnings for both research groups hovered at about \$5,000, with earnings increasing from about \$2,000 in Year 1 to about \$3,000 in Year 2. Overall, these earnings levels are quite low.

While Transitional Living did not produce a statistically significant impact on young people's *average* earnings, the program did have a modest, positive effect at some earnings levels. Focusing on Year 2, the Transitional Living program had a statistically significant impact of 6 percentage points on the proportion of young people earning \$2,500 or more.

Impacts on Criminal Involvement

There are no statistically significant differences between program and control group members in their rates of arrest or conviction (Table ES.1). Just under half of the members of both groups were arrested at some point in the two years following study enrollment. About one-third of sample members were arrested in Year 1, and one-third in Year 2. About one-fifth of both research groups were convicted of a crime during the two years following study enrollment.

Table ES.1
Two-Year Impacts on Education, Employment and Earnings,
and Criminal Involvement

Primary Outcome, by Domain ^a	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
<u>Education</u>				
Enrolled in a postsecondary institution (%)	22.0	25.4	-3.4	0.111
Year 1	18.9	18.4	0.4	0.821
Year 2	11.4	13.6	-2.2	0.212
<u>Employment and earnings</u>				
Total earnings (\$)	5,240	5,016	224	0.555
Year 1	2,233	2,130	103	0.562
Year 2	3,006	2,885	121	0.641
Year 1 earnings (%)				
\$2,500 or more	30.5	25.5	5.1 **	0.035
\$5,000 or more	16.7	13.4	3.3 *	0.083
\$7,500 or more	9.0	7.9	1.1	0.462
Year 2 earnings (%)				
\$2,500 or more	36.6	30.3	6.3 **	0.016
\$5,000 or more	22.9	19.2	3.7	0.105
\$7,500 or more	14.2	13.1	1.1	0.566
<u>Criminal involvement</u>				
Arrested (%)	47.7	47.6	0.1	0.972
Year 1	30.7	31.1	-0.4	0.877
Year 2	34.0	34.9	-0.9	0.721
Convicted of a crime (%)	19.7	17.7	2.0	0.350
Year 1	10.5	9.5	1.0	0.564
Year 2	13.4	12.6	0.9	0.635
Sample size (total = 1,322)	788	534		

(continued)

Table ES.1 continued

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on postsecondary education data from the National Student Clearinghouse, unemployment insurance quarterly earnings data from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and criminal history data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics. Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aUnemployment insurance data are quarter-based; thus, the two-year follow-up period in this table does not necessarily represent the 24 months following random assignment. Rather, the follow-up period represents the eight quarters following the quarter in which participants were randomly assigned.

Impacts by Subgroups of Young People

Subgroup analyses conducted at one year of follow-up examined the pattern of impacts on primary outcomes by history of juvenile justice custody; by geographic setting; by receipt of extended foster care services at baseline through Tennessee’s Department of Children’s Services;³ and by latent classes, or clusters identified by an analysis meant to group young people based on their readiness for independent living using key baseline characteristics. As in the one-year analysis, the results of the two-year analysis showed that the impacts of the Transitional Living program are consistent across the four subgroups analyzed.

Assessment of Two-Year Impact Findings

The Transitional Living program maintained some modest effects on employment and earnings outcomes after two years, though evidence of the program’s effects in this domain are stronger for Year 1 than for Year 2. Notably, earnings levels based on administrative data were quite low for both research groups, underscoring the level of disadvantage experienced by young people in the study.

Statistically significant improvements in education and criminal involvement did not emerge with longer-term follow-up for the outcomes that were measured in these domains. Many of these young people were likely in dire need of income or may have faced more urgent problems related to housing instability or personal safety that precluded their pursuit of higher

³The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 provided funding for states to extend foster care from age 18 through 21 for eligible young people and to expand independent living services.

education. At the same time, much research has shown that it is very difficult to improve criminal involvement outcomes. Services related to criminal justice issues consisted of case management and counseling from TL Specialists, including some interventions related to risky behaviors. However, the program did not have additional components that explicitly focused on changing criminal behavior as it did for some other domains.

Overall, the two-year findings are fairly consistent with those found after the first year of follow-up. However, the research team was unable to assess two-year impacts in three domains that were examined in the one-year analysis, including two domains in which statistically significant effects were found. Specifically, it is unknown whether significant impacts on housing stability and economic well-being and health and safety persisted into a second year.

Discussion and Policy Implications

The Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation is one of the largest rigorous evaluations of services in the United States for young people who were formerly in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. The findings presented here have important implications for future policymaking and research. Taken together, the one- and two-year impact findings show that the Transitional Living program led to modest, positive impacts on a broad range of outcomes in three of the six domains that were measured.

- **Transitional Living led to modest increases in employment and earnings.** The evidence for this finding is stronger for Year 1, showing a statistically significant impact on average earnings for that year, when survey data were used; however, in both years, the administrative data analysis indicates that the program increased the proportion of young people earning over \$2,500 per year, a threshold that falls between the average annual earnings of the study sample in Years 1 and 2.

- **The program increased housing stability and economic well-being,** including a reduction in homelessness, by one year after study enrollment. Data are not available to assess whether impacts in that domain continued into the second year.

- **Significant impacts were found on some of the primary outcomes related to health and safety,** but it is not known whether these impacts continued beyond one year because data were not available.

- **Transitional Living did not lead to significant impacts on education, social support (measured only at one year), or criminal involvement.** The program did not lead to increases in high school graduation or receipt of a GED certificate at one year, nor did it increase postsecondary enrollment over two years. Similarly, it did not reduce criminal involvement as meas-

ured by self-reporting at one year or as measured by administrative data over two years. Finally, there was not a significant impact on social support based on survey data at the one-year mark.

The impact analysis suggests that the Transitional Living program was able to improve outcomes related to immediate needs, such as housing, food, clothing, and avoiding violent relationships, but was not as successful in affecting less immediate outcomes, such as educational attainment. Given the challenges that these young people must overcome, it may be that addressing the basic needs of participants requires a good deal of staff time and resources. Accordingly, less time may be left to address other issues. Nevertheless, Transitional Living affected a broad range of outcomes in some very important domains for young people who are experiencing the transition to adulthood. These findings are particularly noteworthy, given how few other programs have been shown to improve outcomes among young adults formerly in foster care or juvenile justice custody. The results of this study provide evidence that interventions are available that can lessen some of the difficulties that many of these young people face.

Next Steps

As an organization that emphasizes continuous learning and program improvement, Youth Villages is focused on using the evaluation findings as a springboard to strengthen the YVLifeSet model, formerly known as Transitional Living. Youth Villages plans to test new strategies intended to enhance the program's positive effects on the young people it serves, building on the areas where the program has already been successful. Beginning in late 2016, Youth Villages will implement and test a few key modifications to the YVLifeSet model to assess whether they hold promise at a larger scale. Youth Villages is also considering launching a second large-scale study of YVLifeSet in a different context, outside the state of Tennessee.

Earlier MDRC Publications on the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation

Becoming Adults:

One-Year Impact Findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation
2015. Erin Jacobs Valentine, Melanie Skemer, Mark E. Courtney.

Moving Into Adulthood:

Implementation Findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation
2014. Michelle Manno, Erin Jacobs, Julianna Alson, Melanie Skemer.

After Foster Care and Juvenile Justice:

A Preview of the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation
2012. Sara Muller-Ravett and Erin Jacobs.

About MDRC

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

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

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

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

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