Understanding the Potential of Summer Jobs Programs for Youth in Philadelphia

Researchers:

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Sector(s): Crime, Violence, and Conflict, Education, Labor Markets

J-PAL office: J-PAL North America

Location: Pennsylvania, United States of America

Target group: Urban population Youth

Outcome of interest: Arrests and convictions Earnings and income Employment Enrollment and attendance Student learning

Intervention type: Apprenticeships and on-the-job training

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Research Papers: When Scale and Replication Work: Learning from Summer Youth Employment Experime...

Partner organization(s): City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Youth Network

While randomized evaluations in Chicago, and New York City have found that summer youth employment programs reduce violent crime, further understanding which elements of summer job drive these impacts and in which contexts they occur is useful for policymakers implementing summer jobs programs in their own cities. Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to test the impact of being offered a summer job through Philadelphia's WorkReady program on outcomes related to criminal justice involvement, employment, and education.

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Randomized evaluations in New York City and Chicago have shown that 6-8 week summer jobs programs dramatically reduce violent crime and mortality (largely from homicide) for the disadvantaged urban populations they serve. They did not, however, seem to increase engagement in school or the labor force; these cities' summer jobs programs have shown only very small, if any, changes in future education and employment outcomes.

This growing evidence that summer jobs programs have reduced violent crime raises the question of why they produce such an effect. Understanding which elements of summer job programs reduce crime and in what contexts is useful for policymakers seeking to replicate the impacts of these programs in other jurisdictions, and can help researchers and policymakers better understand how to combat youth violence. In addition, understanding whether a differently focused summer jobs program might achieve a different set of impacts can help policymakers more optimally design summer jobs programs to match their particular contexts and goals.

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Youth in low-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia face high levels of violence, poor schooling outcomes, and few labor market opportunities. Over 5,000 young people were shot or killed between 2007 and 2013—more than two per day.[1], Only 65 percent of high school students graduate on time, compared to 82 percent nationally.[2], And the proportion of out-of-school,out-of-work

youth is more than 50 percent higher than in the country as a whole (20 percent versus 13 percent).[3]

In an attempt to address these persistent issues and provide youth with valuable workplace experience, the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) has offered a youth summer jobs programs called WorkReady for over fifteen years. Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney has stated a goal of expanding the WorkReady summer jobs program to serve 16,000 youth by 2020. PYN contracts with over fifty summer jobs providers around the City of Philadelphia to offer thousands of job opportunities each year. Many of these providers also provide jobs to students throughout the school year during out-of-school hours.

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Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to test the impact of being offered a summer job through WorkReady on youth outcomes related to criminal justice involvement, employment and earnings, behavioral health, and education for disadvantaged youth in Philadelphia.

Demand regularly outpaces available jobs for WorkReady each summer; last year over 16,000 youth applied for a summer job through PYN, while less than half were awarded a job opportunity. Historically, slots have been allocated either by first-come, first-served policies or by the choice of the provider. For the 2017 program, PYN and the summer jobs providers have committed to a more equitable distribution of program slots through the implementation of a fair lottery for approximately 1,000 of the 8,000 summer WorkReady slots, with the remaining slots being assigned by providers as usual. Providers could choose to either recruit youth for the lottery themselves or pull from a general pool of youth recruited by PYN.

Approximately 3,000 youth who applied to the WorkReady program participated in a lottery at the start of summer 2017. The WorkReady program offers three job models to meet the needs of different populations: service learning for youth with little or no prior work experience, structured work experience for youth with little or no prior experience, and internship for youth already prepared for the workplace. To accommodate the multiple service models and ensure that youth could reasonably commute to their workplace, eligible youth were categorized based on age and neighborhood before being randomly assigned through the program lottery into either the treatment group or the control group. Youth who were randomly assigned to the treatment group were given one of the 1,000 available program slots set aside for the lottery and were offered a job that was appropriate for their age and hosted by a provider in or near their neighborhood. Youth who were randomly assigned to the control group were not offered the program.

Researchers plan to measure outcomes using a range of administrative data, including data from the Philadelphia School District, the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia courtsystem, and the city's integrated social services database. Researchers will also conduct qualitative surveys of youth in order to understand whether the skills the program targets seem to be impacted.

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Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. City of Philadelphia. 2013. Philadelphia's Strategic Plan to Prevent Youth Violence. https://www.phila.gov/Newsletters/Youth-Violence-ExecutiveSummary%20Sept%202013.pdf
2. Project U-Turn. 2016. The Reality of Graduation Rates. http://projectuturn.net/docs/PUTonepager_early2016.pdf
3. Opportunity Index. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. https://opportunityindex.org/