

Summary of the Albuquerque Argus Evaluation

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Albuquerque Argus, implemented by Youth Development Incorporated (YDI), began programming in October 2010. At that time, 23 participants were randomly assigned to the Argus program and an additional 23 participants to a control group. Young people who entered YDI's Argus program were high school dropouts who tested at 8th grade or 9th grade levels. Some young people were in the juvenile justice system; others were in foster care or homeless; still others were pregnant or had children when they entered the program.

In Albuquerque, success was defined according to the individual needs of and challenges faced by each participant. Following an intake assessment, staff created an individualized, student-centered service plan for each participant considering immediate needs and long-term aspirations. All student-centered service plans included education and work placement as goals. Additionally, service plans addressed salient barriers to success (e.g. substance abuse, child care needs, transportation, behavioral problems) and employed mentoring as a strategy to surmount barriers. For example, some plans reflected students' desires to deal with crises in the home in addition to getting their GED and finding a job. Other participants may have identified an immediate need for stable housing and a longer-term goal to enroll in community college. Still others may have wanted to address substance abuse and addiction problems.

The overarching goal of the YDI Argus program was to create an individualized success plan for each participant through: (1) job placement, (2) mentoring, and (3) properly sequenced training and education.

- **Job Placement.** In order to make job placement goals attainable, The Central New Mexico Community College Workforce Training Center provided employment sector training and certification in the green jobs industry for Argus participants. Entry level green jobs in weatherization became the mainstay of the Argus program as this particular field was most accessible to individuals with very low levels of education.
- **Mentoring.** Each engaged Argus participant received a mentor. In collaboration with another YDI program and the homebuilding industry, caring adults with careers in construction were paired with Argus participants. Mentors modeled success in career fields that participants aspired to enter. Participants checked in with mentors a minimum of once or twice a month and engaged in one to two community service projects per quarter with mentors. “Deep mentoring”, that is implemented in other Eisenhower replications, was similarly executed in Albuquerque. Argus staff included social workers and individuals with case management backgrounds. These individuals—particularly the program director and dedicated case manager—integrated themselves into the lives of Argus participants by helping them to address barriers to success, advocating for youth by interacting with the parents and the juvenile justice system, and generally being a caring and consistent adult figures.
- **Sequencing of Training and Education.** The Albuquerque Argus program began with workforce training and ended with GED/educational training. Workforce training incorporated reading and math classes as a way to improve job skills and re-introduce high school dropouts to the classroom setting. The added benefit to this sequencing was facilitating GED instruction. The workforce training emphasis on math and reading generally improved participants’ GED assessment scores by at least one grade level.

The evaluation of the Albuquerque Argus program primarily relied on: (1) a pre-GED assessment to test basic reading and math skills and (2) a survey to understand youth work habits, education, socioeconomic status, aspirations, and engagement in delinquent behavior (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse, arrests, involvement with police, gang and other criminal activity). Argus participants and control group members were given the pre-GED assessment and survey at baseline, a few weeks in advance of program startup, and again at follow-up, approximately 10 months after the program was implemented.

Based on survey results, there were statistically significant differences among Argus associates and control group members in the areas of education, employment and deviant behaviors. After the Argus program was implemented, the majority (69.6%) of Argus associates reported having received their GED or being enrolled in a GED program with the goal of taking the test; the majority (65.2%) of control group members reported not having a GED and noted that they were not working toward attaining one. More Argus associates (47.8%) were employed compared to control group members (13%). Argus associate were also less likely to sell illegal drugs, steal, get stopped by police or to be arrested compared to the control group.