

An Introduction to the World of Work
**A Study of the Implementation and Impacts of New York
City's Summer Youth Employment Program**

**Erin Jacobs Valentine
Chloe Anderson
Farhana Hossain
Rebecca Unterman**

**Prepared for:
U.S. Department of Labor
Chief Evaluation Office
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210**

April 2017



This project was prepared for the the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Chief Evaluation Office, by MDRC, under contract number GS-10F-0245N. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial projects, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. government.

Additional funding for this project was provided anonymously by a private foundation.

Overview

At the turn of the 21st century, employment rates among teenagers and young adults in the United States began falling dramatically, a trend that accelerated during the Great Recession and has since reversed little. In this context, public programs that provide paid summer jobs to young people may play an especially important role in providing early work experiences for teenagers and young adults who would not otherwise have them. Participants in these programs benefit by earning immediate income and may also learn valuable work-related soft skills that could help them in the future.

This report examines the impacts of the nation's largest summer youth jobs program — New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) — on young people's education, employment, and earnings. MDRC's evaluation, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and a private foundation, includes a sample of nearly 265,000 young people who applied to SYEP for the first time between 2006 and 2010. The analysis uses an experimental design that relies on SYEP's randomized lottery application system. Drawing on interviews, focus groups, and a survey of service providers conducted in 2015, the report also describes SYEP's implementation and the experiences of participants.

The implementation analysis reveals a consistent theme: SYEP's large scale greatly shapes its implementation and participants' experiences. Identifying and screening work sites and making job placements for nearly 50,000 young people each summer is an enormous undertaking that requires year-round planning and coordination. SYEP's size also makes it challenging to provide meaningful, skill-building work experiences for all participants. As a result, there is considerable variation in the types and quality of SYEP work experiences, even within the same job sector and industry.

The impact analysis shows that SYEP had large impacts on young people's employment and earnings during the summer for which they applied. As a result of the program, those who won places in SYEP through a randomized lottery were 54 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned \$580 more during that summer, on average, than those who did not. In other words, the program met its primary objective of increasing the employment and income of New York City's young people during the summer. And it did so with minimal "substitution": most applicants who lost their lotteries, especially the youngest of them (the 14- and 15-year-olds), did not find other jobs during that summer. Apart from these impacts on individuals, SYEP also partly bears the labor costs for a substantial number of employers, including hundreds of day camps. SYEP was less successful in improving longer-term outcomes: the program had little effect on education, employment, or earnings beyond the initial summer.

The implementation and impact findings presented in this report highlight the tension between the program's short- and long-term goals, as it is difficult to provide jobs and income to a large number of young people in a short period while at the same time providing services that are individually tailored and that are intensive enough to alter their long-term outcomes. Some new and future changes may strengthen the program, however. In recent years, the city has made efforts to customize services for some types of participants and to make program funding more consistent, and there are plans to pilot test some adaptations to the program in the future. It will be important to assess whether such changes improve the program without jeopardizing what it currently does well.

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Acknowledgments

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Evaluation and this report would not have been possible without the support of many individuals and organizations. The evaluation was funded by the Department of Labor (DOL) and with additional funding provided anonymously by a foundation. Molly Irwin, our project officer at DOL, provided valuable guidance and suggestions throughout the project.

We are grateful to the staff of New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) for their support with the evaluation and their comments on the report. In particular, we thank Julia Breitman, Andre White, Christopher Lewis, and Alan Cheng for their generous assistance throughout the process. They shared a great deal of information about the program and the lottery system, patiently answered our many questions about their work with the program, helped us gain access to program management data, and helped arrange site visits and focus groups for the implementation research. Yael Bat-Chava, Robert Frenzel-Berra, Lisa Gulick, and Daphne Montanez also reviewed the report. At Community Software Solutions, which runs the SYEP lotteries and maintains the program's data, Erin Connolly provided invaluable information about the data and lottery system, and Herb Branan and Robert Graham pulled data files for us.

We could not have learned about the implementation of SYEP without the help of the staff members at the provider organizations. We are sincerely thankful to everyone who participated in the survey, helped us to arrange focus groups with SYEP participants at their organizations, and made time in their busy schedules to participate in interviews. Provider staff members also helped us to arrange interviews with representatives of employers who provide work sites for SYEP participants; we are also thankful to those employer representatives who spoke with us about their experiences.

We are also grateful to the agencies that generously provided data for this project. At the New York State Department of Labor, we would like to thank Marshall H. Day, Jeffrey Sorensen, Doug Lukaszewski, Brian Close, and Dan Wolfe for their assistance in sharing employment and earnings data with us. At the New York City Department of Education, we would like to thank Michelle Paladino, who helped us to access high school and college education data, and Rachel Cole, who pulled the data files and answered numerous data-processing questions along the way.

At MDRC, particular thanks are due to Hannah Wagner and Ann Bickerton, who assisted with qualitative data collection and analysis. On the quantitative data front, Alla Chaplygina capably assisted with data acquisition and Micah DeLaurentis provided valuable insight on data processing. Rose Kob helped secure data-sharing agreements that were at the core of the

project. Gordon Berlin, Howard Bloom, Dan Bloom, Rob Ivry, John Hutchins, and MDRC consultant Richard Kazis provided valuable comments on report drafts. Jonathan Timm coordinated the production of this report. Joshua Malbin edited the report and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication.

Finally, we are especially grateful to the young people who participated in the focus groups and interviews for the implementation research, and allowed us to learn from their experiences.

The Authors

Executive Summary

At the turn of the 21st century, employment rates among American teenagers and young adults began falling dramatically, a trend that accelerated during the Great Recession and has since reversed little.¹ In this context, public programs that provide paid summer jobs to young people may play an especially important role in providing early work experiences to teenagers and young adults who would not otherwise have them. Participants benefit by earning immediate income and may also learn valuable work-related soft skills that could help them in the future.

This report examines the impacts of the nation’s largest summer youth jobs program — New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) — on young people’s education, employment, and earnings. MDRC’s evaluation, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and a private foundation, includes a sample of nearly 265,000 young adults who applied to SYEP for the first time between 2006 and 2010. The analysis uses an experimental design that relies on SYEP’s randomized lottery application system. Drawing on interviews, focus groups, and a survey of service providers conducted in 2015, the report also describes SYEP’s implementation and the experiences of participants. As discussed further below:

- **SYEP’s large scale greatly shapes its implementation.** The program is an enormous undertaking, and it can be challenging to provide every participant with a meaningful work experience. The types and quality of SYEP work experiences vary considerably, even within the same job sector and industry.
- **SYEP had large impacts on young people’s employment and earnings during the summer for which they applied, but it had little impact beyond that summer.** Young people who won places in the program through the lottery were 54 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned \$580 more during that summer, on average, than those who did not.

Background

Nationally, hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding once supported summer jobs programs for over 500,000 young adults per year,² but the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 ended that funding.³ Some summer jobs programs continued to operate using other funding, but

¹Child Trends, “Youth Employment: Indicators on Children and Youth” (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, 2015).

²Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara, *Vulnerable Youth: Employment and Job Training Programs* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015).

³Martha Ross and Richard Kazis, *Youth Summer Jobs Programs: Aligning Ends and Means* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2016).

generally at a smaller scale.⁴ Substantial federal funding for summer youth jobs programs temporarily returned in response to the Great Recession. In 2009, states used about \$700 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to provide summer jobs for young people.⁵ Only small amounts of federal funding have been available in recent years, however.⁶

An emerging body of research, including two studies of SYEP, suggests that summer youth employment programs can accomplish a number of short-term goals: providing a source of income that young people may not otherwise have,⁷ reducing their likelihood of being involved in illegal activities,⁸ and improving their educational outcomes such as school attendance and attempts at taking statewide exams required for high school graduation.⁹ It is less clear whether these programs can lead to longer-term improvements in education, employment, or earnings. Thus far, research findings have not provided evidence that they do.¹⁰

The SYEP Model

Between 2004 and 2015, New York City's SYEP placed about 25,000 to 50,000 young people in summer jobs each year, with annual applications recently exceeding 120,000. The program has operated continuously since 1963, relying on city and state funds in times with little or no federal funding. Since 2003, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has administered SYEP.

SYEP offers people ages 14 to 24 minimum-wage, entry-level jobs with public and private employers across the city, and educational workshops on work readiness, financial literacy,

⁴Linda Harris, *The Tragic Loss of the Summer Jobs Program: Why It Is Time to Reinstate!* (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2007).

⁵Jeanne Bellotti, Linda Rosenberg, Samina Sattar, Andrea Mraz Esposito, and Jessica Ziegler, *Reinvesting in America's Youth: Lessons from the 2009 Recovery Act Summer Youth Employment Initiative* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2010).

⁶Ross and Kazis (2016).

⁷Alexander Gelber, Adam Isen, and Judd B. Kessler, "The Effects of Youth Employment: Evidence from New York City Lotteries," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 131, 1 (2015): 381-422; Wendy S. McClanahan, Cynthia L. Sipe, and Thomas J. Smith, *Enriching Summer Work: An Evaluation of the Summer Career Exploration Program* (New York: Public/Private Ventures, 2004).

⁸Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); Alexander Gelber, Adam Isen, Judd B. Kessler, and Sarah Tahamont, "The Effects of Summer Youth Employment: Evidence from New York City Lotteries," presented at the 2016 Association for Policy Analysis and Management Fall Research Conference, Washington, DC, November 2016; Sarah Heller, "Summer Jobs Reduce Violence Among Disadvantaged Youth," *Science* 346, 6,214 (2014): 1,219-1,223.

⁹Jacob Leos-Urbel, "What Is a Summer Job Worth? The Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Academic Outcomes," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 33, 4 (2014): 891-911. Though note that Heller (2014) did not find such impacts.

¹⁰Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

career exploration, postsecondary (college) education, and personal health.¹¹ The program lasts six to seven weeks in July and August, and offers up to 25 hours of paid work and educational services each week.¹² From 2004 to 2012, SYEP dedicated at least 10 percent of paid program time to educational services for all participants. Starting in 2013, participants of different ages have received different services: 14- and 15-year-olds can participate in up to 20 hours each week, 5 of which are to be in educational workshops, while older participants can work up to 25 hours a week and receive educational services only during a mandatory orientation.

Operating the program requires cooperation among DYCD, community-based service providers, and employers. The providers, of which there are about 50 per year, include multi-service social agencies, community colleges, economic development agencies, and other organizations that focus on workforce and youth development. These providers act as intermediaries among young people, employers, and DYCD; recruit employers and young people for the program; place participants in jobs; run the workshops; and monitor participants' progress throughout the summer. Employers are responsible for supervising SYEP participants at their jobs. DYCD provides training and technical support and carries out oversight and monitoring.

Like other summer jobs programs, SYEP largely focuses on short-term goals, including reducing youth unemployment during the summer, introducing participants to the world of work, and providing participants and their families with income. The program also seeks to improve participants' long-term employment prospects by helping them develop work-appropriate soft skills and life skills, and by helping them understand their higher education and career options. While SYEP does not explicitly aim to improve participants' educational outcomes, the work experience may combat "summer learning loss" (in which students lose academic skills over the summer due to a lack of structured activities), and the summer income may reduce their need to work during the school year and allow them to better engage in school.

The Implementation of SYEP

This study's implementation analysis relies on data collected in 2015 from interviews with DYCD staff members, a survey of and interviews with provider staff members, focus groups and interviews with program participants, and interviews with people who applied to SYEP but did not participate. These data provide insights into how SYEP works on the ground and the factors that influence its implementation and participants' experiences.

¹¹The age limit for SYEP eligibility was raised from 21 to 24 in 2009.

¹²Until 2012, the program lasted seven weeks; since 2013, the program has lasted six weeks.

- **Placing nearly 50,000 people into jobs each summer is an enormous undertaking requiring considerable planning and coordination.**

In the first half of each year, the SYEP providers and DYCD prepare for the program's July start by identifying and screening work sites, hiring and training staff members, and conducting youth outreach. To do so they make use of an infrastructure of work sites, community partnerships, and awareness about SYEP that has built up over the program's long history.

Uncertainty about annual funding levels made the planning process more difficult in recent years. After 2000, in the absence of steady federal funding for summer jobs programs, SYEP has relied more on allocations from the city and state, which have fluctuated from year to year. Since the city has generally reached budget agreements in mid- to late June, DYCD and the providers often have not known the number of summer jobs SYEP could offer until weeks before the program began, resulting in a scramble to identify and screen work sites and to plan staffing. In 2016, the city committed to a baseline budget to serve at least 60,000 young people each summer, which is expected to alleviate this problem.

- **The scale of SYEP makes it challenging to provide meaningful work experiences that can develop every participant's skills.**

While providers aim to make a variety of types of jobs available, their ability to do so is often limited by employers' staffing needs. For example, camps and day care programs make up a large share of SYEP work sites because they rely on SYEP for temporary workers when families are looking for affordable child care options during the summer. But many for-profit businesses may not need to hire temporary workers during the summer. For that reason, SYEP's work-site options can be limited to particular sectors able to absorb large numbers of short-term workers. Participants must also be placed quickly after they enroll in the program. These facts together make it difficult to match young people to jobs based on their interests and preferences.

- **Participants' experiences in the program can vary greatly depending on their providers and work sites.**

The thousands of SYEP employers across the city include public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses of varying sizes, organizational characteristics, and labor needs. Between 2006 and 2014, most SYEP participants (73 percent) were placed with nonprofit organizations and nearly half (46 percent) worked for summer camps or day care programs,¹³ but the rest worked in diverse industries. Since participants spend most of their SYEP hours at work, the characteristics and cultures of their work sites greatly shape their experiences. The tasks participants perform and their opportunities to build skills and profes-

¹³Fourteen percent were placed at government agencies and 13 percent with for-profit businesses.

sional relationships also vary depending on the work site, even within the same industry and sector. For example, young people working at one day care helped the teachers serve food to children and take them on field trips, while those at another provided individual academic tutoring.

SYEP participants also experience different levels of supervision, mentoring, and support depending on their work sites. Employers are responsible for supervising young people at the work sites, and the level and quality of their supervision and support reflect staff members' management styles and workloads, their organizations' cultures, and the number of participants they oversee. Only a handful of participants reported making deep, potentially long-term connections with supervisors. The size of the program also makes it difficult for provider staff members to have meaningful interactions with young people when they visit work sites, especially those employing large numbers of SYEP participants.

The quality of the educational workshops varies widely among providers and often depends on their ability to draw on their existing organizational resources and community partnerships. For example, some providers have certified teachers, college counselors, or financial education advisers who deliver their educational services, while others rely on seasonal staff members who may or may not have experience with such workshops or their content.

Impact Analysis Methods, Data, and Sample

The second component of this evaluation focuses on estimating the “impacts” of the SYEP program. The impacts represent the difference the program makes in the lives of young people. In other words, to what extent does the program lead to better outcomes for young people than they would have had without it? The analysis estimates SYEP's impacts among 264,075 young people who applied to the program for the first time between 2006 and 2010.

The evaluation takes advantage of DYCD's randomized admission lotteries to conduct an experimental analysis.¹⁴ Each year, young people applied in April or May to one service provider, and were entered into a randomized lottery that selected applicants to be offered places with that provider.¹⁵ In the analysis, young people who were selected in a lottery are included in the program group, and young people who were not selected are included in the control group, whether or not they ultimately participated in SYEP. Because the lotteries are random, the program and control groups within each lottery are expected to be equivalent with respect to their measured and unmeasured characteristics at the time they applied. The differ-

¹⁴DYCD continues to use lotteries, though the process has changed somewhat since 2010.

¹⁵If a provider had slots reserved for young people with disabilities, two lotteries were run.

ences that emerge between the two groups over time can therefore be attributed with confidence to SYEP (after accounting for the particular lottery into which each applicant was entered).¹⁶

The analysis examines the impacts of winning an SYEP lottery on three sets of outcomes: employment and earnings during the summer following the initial application; employment and earnings over the five years thereafter; and educational outcomes (high school attendance and completion as well as college enrollment and graduation).

Partly because only first-time applicants are included, the sample skews young, with about 52 percent being 14 or 15 years old at the start of the summer for which they applied. A little over half are female (54 percent) and most are either black (43 percent) or Hispanic (30 percent). Most were in school, with 86 percent reporting they were in high school or below and 7 percent reporting they were in college. Many were from low-income families, as about 80 percent of those in middle or high school were eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.

Participation in SYEP

- **Although not all program group members participated in SYEP, and a small percentage of control group members did, winning an SYEP lottery had a large, statistically significant impact on a young person's probability of participating in SYEP.**

In the summer for which they applied, 67 percent of program group members and 6 percent of control group members participated in SYEP.¹⁷ It is not surprising that a substantial proportion of program group members did not participate. Although all program group members were offered slots in SYEP, each lottery winner had only five business days to respond. It is likely that some of them were not successfully reached or missed that window. Some of them may have also found other summer opportunities between the time they applied (in March and April) and the time they were notified of their selection (typically between May and July). It is also not surprising that a small number of control group members did participate, since some people who were not selected in the main lotteries were offered places in SYEP later on.¹⁸

¹⁶The regression models used to estimate impacts include fixed effects to account for lottery strata.

¹⁷Young people could apply to SYEP in subsequent years, and whether they won the lottery in those years was not affected by whether they had won it before. Therefore, some members of both groups also participated later. The program group remained significantly more likely to have *ever* participated in SYEP in the five years after application (72 percent did, compared with 29 percent of the control group).

¹⁸In some cases, providers had small numbers of slots that were unfilled a few weeks into program operation, and to fill these positions they called people on the applicant list. Those who said they were still interested were entered into another randomized lottery. Since data about these lotteries were not available, research group assignment for this evaluation relies only on the main lotteries.

Impacts During the Application Summer

Figure ES.1 shows impacts on employment and earnings during the application summer (the summer for which young people applied). The bars to the left show average total employment and the bars to the right show average total earnings. Total employment and earnings include SYEP jobs and wages as well as those from other jobs. Within each set of bars, the share from other (non-SYEP) jobs is indicated by the diagonal striped lines.

- **SYEP greatly increased total employment and earnings during the application summer by employing young people who would not have worked otherwise.**

As the figure shows, the average program group member was 54 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned \$580 more than the average control group member during the application summer — a 290 percent increase in employment and a 200 percent increase in earnings. These positive impacts on total employment and earnings were entirely the result of employment and earnings from SYEP itself. The findings indicate that SYEP met its central objectives of introducing young people to the world of work, providing supplemental income to families, and reducing youth unemployment during the summer.

Impacts in the Five Years After the Application Summer

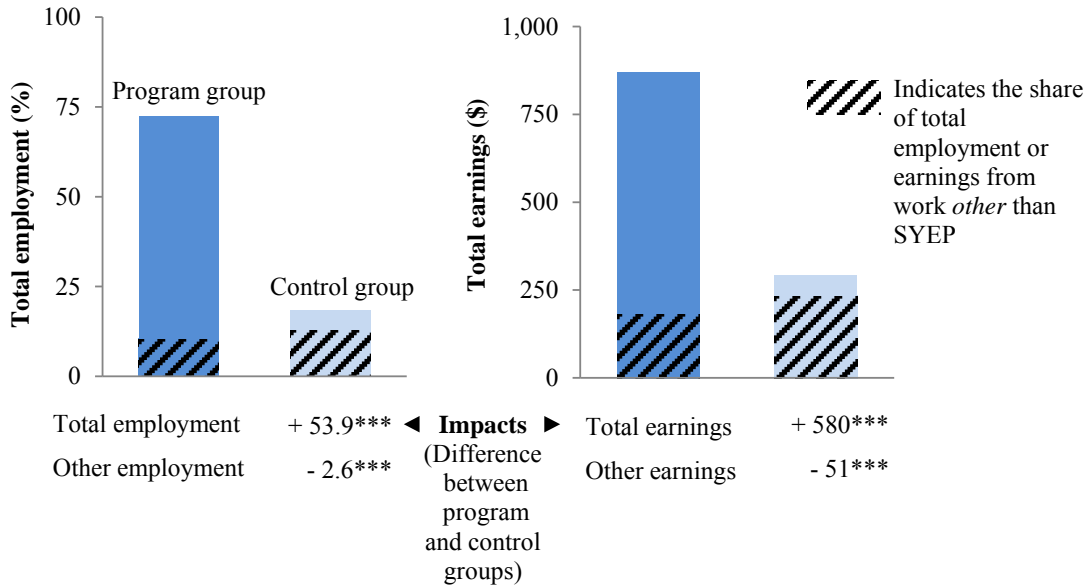
While SYEP mainly seeks to affect outcomes for young people during the summer itself, it also aims to have longer-lasting impacts on employment and education. This section assesses whether such impacts emerged over the five years following the initial application summer. Figure ES.2 depicts average employment and earnings among the program and control groups during those five years.

- **SYEP had little impact on employment and earnings in the five years after the application summer.**

SYEP had small, statistically significant positive impacts on total employment in Follow-Up Years 1 and 2 (0.9 percentage points and 0.5 percentage points, respectively), before the program and control group means converged. As the figure shows, these positive impacts on total employment were entirely the result of higher SYEP employment among program group members. (Program group members were somewhat more likely to reapply to SYEP in later summers.) Interestingly, SYEP had statistically significant negative impacts on total earnings during the same period, which may mean that control group members obtained jobs that paid more or that were more permanent. However, these impacts were short-lived and probably too small to be meaningful. For example, in Follow-Up Year 1, control group members earned only \$40 (or 3 percent) more, on average, than program group members.

Figure ES.1

Impacts on Employment and Earnings During the Application Summer



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

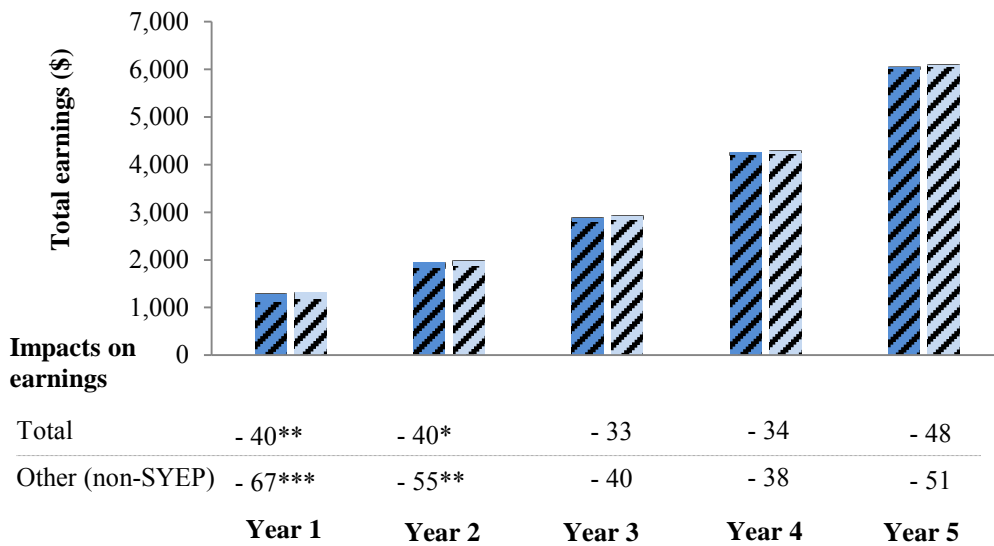
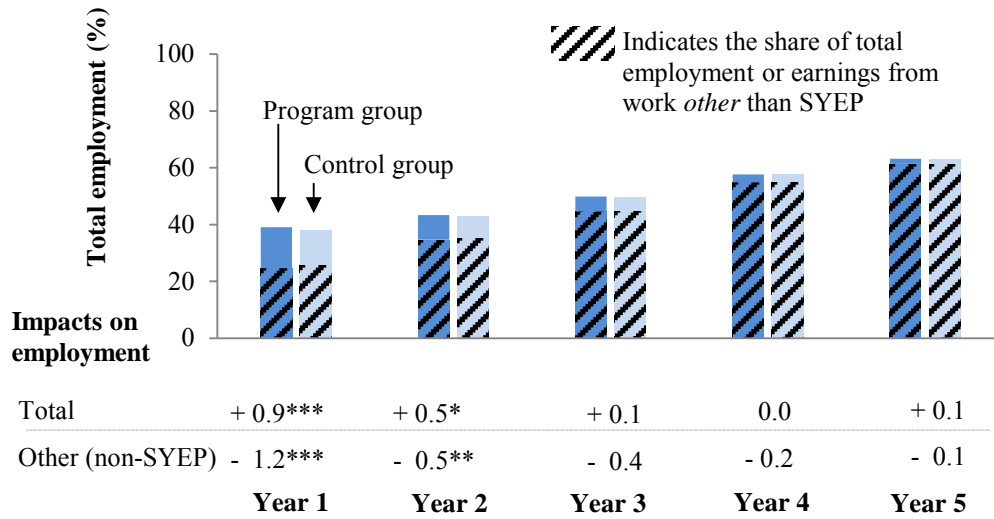
- **SYEP did not affect high school or college outcomes.**

SYEP did not increase the number of school days young people attended during Follow-Up Year 1 (both the program and control group attended 83 percent of the time, on average), nor did it increase their likelihood of graduating on time from high school (that is, within four years of entering).¹⁹ Fifty-seven percent of both groups did so. Similarly, SYEP did not increase college enrollment or graduation in the five years after the application summer (56 percent and 6 percent, respectively, for both groups).

¹⁹The analytic sample used to estimate impacts on educational outcomes excludes young people who were not enrolled in the New York City public school system during the years after the application summer.

Figure ES.2

**Impacts on Employment and Earnings
During the Five Years After the Application Summer**



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

Discussion of Findings and Policy Implications

SYEP is an iconic program that plays a role in the lives of tens of thousands of young adults and in the overall economy in New York City. It dwarfs many other youth-focused programs nationwide and partly bears the labor costs for more than 1,000 day camps, many of which serve low-income families who need child care and enrichment options for their children during the summer. Each year, the program also puts tens of millions of dollars, in total, into the pockets of participants,²⁰ most of whom are from low-income families.

This report provides new insights into SYEP's impacts on employment, earnings, and education. The results show that SYEP succeeds in achieving its primary short-term goal: providing work experience and income to a large number of young people who would not otherwise be working. About 72 percent of program group members worked during the summer, a rate nearly four times that of control group members and far higher than youth employment rates overall.²¹ On average, program group members earned \$580, or three times more than control group members, a substantial amount of money that participants said they used for things like buying school supplies, saving for college, and contributing to their families.

Despite SYEP's large impacts on employment and earnings during the application summer, the program appears to have little sustained impact on longer-term outcomes in education and the labor market. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that summer jobs programs are effective in engaging young people in short-term work, but generally do not increase employment, earnings, or educational attainment beyond the summer.

The broader evidence base for youth employment programs suggests that improving longer-term outcomes for young people would require additional, more costly program components that respond to their needs. For example, career-specific training and work experience, combined with support to address personal development and barriers to success, can influence young people's employment outcomes over the long term.²² However, it may be very difficult for a program as large as SYEP to add such services. SYEP providers place tens of thousands of young people into summer jobs in a very short time. Without substantial additional resources, it is difficult to imagine how they could incorporate more intensive program components. Indeed, in recent years DYCD has made efforts to customize SYEP's services for different groups of

²⁰Between 2006 and 2014, the total amount paid to SYEP participants ranged from about \$25 million to about \$45 million per year.

²¹Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Mykhaylo Trubskyy, Martha Ross, Walter McHugh, and Sheila Palma, *The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2014).

²²Farhana Hossain and Dan Bloom, *Toward a Better Future: Evidence on Improving Employment Outcomes for Disadvantaged Youth in the United States* (New York: MDRC, 2015).

participants based on their ages, disability statuses, and other characteristics, but these options serve a small share of participants for logistical and cost-related reasons. Still, the city continues to work toward improving the program, and in 2017 DYCD will conduct a few small-scale pilot tests of new program models targeting young people with varying service needs.

The findings in this report suggest that when assessing SYEP's success and making decisions about its future, it is important to consider a tension that exists between the program's short- and long-term goals. As a mechanism for creating thousands of jobs and providing additional income to participants, SYEP is very successful. In considering changes designed to improve the long-term impacts of SYEP or similar programs, funders and practitioners will want to seek solutions that do not unintentionally jeopardize the program's ability to meet this primary short-term goal.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Compared with previous generations of Americans, the teenagers and young adults of the 21st century are less likely to gain early work experiences. Teenage employment rates began declining precipitously at the turn of the century, a trend that accelerated during the Great Recession that began in 2007 and has since reversed little.¹ While more than half of teens worked at some point during 2000, the early 2010s saw this rate dip below 30 percent.² Young adults ages 20 to 24 have also experienced a decline in employment rates since 2000, albeit a less pronounced one. In both groups, young people from low-income families are the least likely to work.³

Given these trends, public programs that provide paid summer jobs to young people may play an important role in providing early work experiences for teenagers and young adults who would not otherwise have them. Participants in these programs may benefit in a number of ways, including earning immediate income, keeping themselves occupied in a productive summer activity, and learning valuable work-related soft skills that could help them to make an easier transition into the adult world of work. Recent research has shown that summer jobs programs can produce some short-term benefits, but whether they lead to better outcomes in the long term is less clear.⁴

This report examines the impacts of the nation’s largest summer youth jobs program — New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) — on education, employment, and earnings. MDRC’s evaluation, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and a private foundation, includes a sample of nearly 265,000 young people who applied to the program for the first time between 2006 and 2010. The evaluation is using an experimental design that takes advantage of the randomized lotteries used to determine which applicants are offered places in the program. Drawing on interviews, focus groups, and a survey of SYEP providers conducted in 2015, this report also describes the implementation of SYEP and the experiences of some of the young people who participated in it; this information is important for understanding the impact findings.

¹Child Trends (2015).

²Sum et al. (2014).

³Sum et al. (2014).

⁴Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); Heller (2014); Leos-Urbel (2014); McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

As discussed further below, the implementation analysis reveals two main themes. First, SYEP's large scale greatly shapes its implementation. Identifying and screening work sites and making job placements for as many as 50,000 young people each year is an enormous undertaking that requires a good deal of planning and coordination. SYEP's size also makes it challenging to provide meaningful, skill-building work experiences for all participants. Second, there is considerable variation in the types and quality of SYEP work experiences, even within the same job sector and industry.

The impact analysis shows that SYEP had large impacts on young people's employment and earnings during the summer for which they applied. As a result of employment through the program, young people who won their lotteries to participate in SYEP were 54 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned \$580 more during the summer that followed, on average, than young people who did not. In other words, the program met its primary objectives of providing supplemental income to New York City families and reducing youth unemployment during the summer. Beyond these impacts on individuals, SYEP also partly bears the labor costs for a substantial number of employers, including hundreds of day camps, many of which serve low-income families. SYEP was less successful in improving longer-term outcomes: the program had little effect on young people's education, employment, or earnings beyond the initial summer.

Summer Jobs Programs for Young People

Originally begun in 1964 as part of the Neighborhood Youth Corps, a War on Poverty program, the federal Summer Youth Employment Program once provided hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to support summer jobs for over 500,000 young people per year.⁵ But the programs were criticized for offering jobs with little connection to the real world of work and research failed to show that they produced long-term benefits.⁶ Summer jobs programs lost support, and federal funding ended with the enactment of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.⁷ Although some summer jobs programs continued to operate using city or state funding, they were generally unable to serve as many young people as they had before.⁸ Substantial federal funding for summer youth jobs programs temporarily returned in response to the Great Recession; in 2009, states used about \$700 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to provide summer jobs for young people.⁹ In 2016, the Summer Jobs and Beyond program

⁵Fernandes-Alcantara (2015); U.S. General Accounting Office (1979).

⁶McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004)

⁷McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

⁸Harris (2007).

⁹Bellotti et al. (2010).

provided a comparatively tiny \$21 million in grants to fund summer jobs programs in 11 communities.¹⁰

Summer youth employment programs have several goals, some of which are immediate. First, they provide a source of income that young people may not otherwise have, especially with youth employment rates so low. Such income may be particularly important to young people from low-income families. In addition, the programs aim to “keep kids off the street” and make it less likely that they will get involved in illegal activities during the summer months when they might not otherwise be occupied.

Beyond the summer itself, a central goal of summer youth employment programs is to set young people up to be successful in the adult world of work. The programs aim to provide young people with early work histories, connections with employers who can serve as references, and soft skills, all of which, it is hoped, will help them obtain and keep jobs in the future.

Some summer youth employment programs also aim to improve education outcomes indirectly. For high school-age young people, engaging in a productive activity over the summer has the potential to reduce summer learning loss and help them readjust to the regular school schedule in the fall.¹¹ Proponents of summer jobs programs also argue that the experiences young people gain in their jobs, including interactions with working adults, may help them to understand the importance of education.¹² Some programs focus on education more directly by including components designed to teach young people about the benefits of college credentials.

What Is Already Known

New studies of summer youth employment programs, including two studies of New York City’s SYEP specifically, suggest that they can meet many of their short-term goals. The programs, including SYEP, succeed in meeting their primary goal of increasing youth employment and earnings during the summer.¹³ In other words, the programs do get cash into the pockets of large numbers of young people who would not otherwise earn it.

There is also some evidence of short-term impacts on education, though the evidence in this area is more mixed. One study of SYEP found that the program increases school attendance

¹⁰Ross and Kazis (2016).

¹¹“Summer learning loss” refers to the decline in academic skills some students experience due to a lack of educational or enrichment activities during the long break from school. See McLaughlin and Smink (2009).

¹²McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

¹³Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

and attempts at taking the exams required for high school graduation in New York State.¹⁴ However, an evaluation of the One Summer Plus summer jobs program, which targeted young people in Chicago communities with high rates of violence, did not find similar positive impacts. Indeed, that evaluation found that the program actually reduced participation in summer school in the short term.¹⁵

Summer youth employment programs may also prevent young people from getting into trouble. The evaluation of One Summer Plus found that the program reduced participation in violent crime both during the summer and in subsequent months.¹⁶ In addition, recent research on SYEP finds reductions in arrests and convictions, though the impacts do not persist beyond the summer.¹⁷ Still, the program appears to reduce admissions to prison for older groups in the long term.¹⁸

It is less clear whether summer youth employment programs in general, and SYEP specifically, can lead to longer-term improvements in education, employment, or earnings. Thus far, there has been no evidence that the programs lead to higher rates of college enrollment or completion.¹⁹ Previous studies have also found that, after the summer itself, summer jobs programs do not lead to increases in employment or earnings.²⁰ In fact, one study of SYEP found a small, negative effect on earnings in some follow-up years.²¹

What This Study Adds

MDRC launched this evaluation of SYEP to build on the existing knowledge and evidence about summer youth jobs programs. The study has two components, one that explores the program's implementation and a second that assesses its impacts.

The implementation portion of the MDRC study includes a number of components designed to learn about how the SYEP program is implemented and how young people experience it. It draws on participation data provided by the city, information gathered from service providers through interviews and questionnaires, focus groups with participating young people, and interviews with young people who applied to SYEP, some of whom participated in the

¹⁴Leos-Urbel (2014); Schwartz, Leos-Urbel, and Wiswall (2015).

¹⁵Heller (2014).

¹⁶Heller (2014).

¹⁷Gelber, Isen, Kessler, and Tahamont (2016).

¹⁸Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015).

¹⁹Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015).

²⁰Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

²¹Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015).

program and some of whom did not. These sources describe the services that participants are receiving from SYEP, the challenges and strategies involved in implementing the program, and the ways program implementation and young people's experiences vary. Such information provides context to the findings about the program's impacts.

The second major goal of the MDRC study is to assess SYEP's impacts on the employment, earnings, and education of young people who first applied to the program between 2006 and 2010. The analysis focuses first on assessing how the program affected young people's employment and earnings during the summer after they first applied to the program. Then it examines SYEP's medium-term impacts on employment, earnings, and education, presenting five-year impact estimates for all cohorts included in the sample.²² In addition, to reveal the difference SYEP made over a longer follow-up period, the report presents nine-year impact estimates for young people who applied to SYEP for the summer of 2006. Finally, the analysis explores whether the program had different impacts on participants of different ages, and whether it had different impacts on young people who applied before and during the period of high unemployment associated with the Great Recession.

The MDRC study extends beyond the existing studies of SYEP in several ways. First, compared with the basic descriptions of the SYEP program that other researchers have provided, MDRC's implementation analysis provides a much richer understanding of SYEP's services, the challenges and strategies involved in implementing the program, and the experiences of young people who applied to the program.²³

The impact analysis also makes several new contributions. While other studies have not included any young people who first applied to the program after the summer of 2008,²⁴ this study includes young people who applied for the summers of 2009 and 2010, during the heart of the Great Recession. The analysis also extends the follow-up period for impacts on employment and earnings to 9 years, well past the maximum of 4.5 years included in previous research.²⁵ Finally, the follow-up data used for the present study are more detailed than those used for previous research. Others had only annual measures of employment and earnings and were unable to separate SYEP employment from other employment accurately.²⁶ In contrast, the quarterly data used in the present study make it possible to distinguish employment that oc-

²²In this report, a "cohort" refers to all of the members of the study sample who first applied to the program in a given year.

²³See Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); Leos-Urbel (2014).

²⁴Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015) included the 2005 through 2008 cohorts; Leos-Urbel (2014) included the 2007 cohort only.

²⁵See Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015).

²⁶Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015) used annual federal income tax return data to measure employment, earnings, and college enrollment.

curred during the application summer itself from employment that occurred earlier or later in the year. This ability is important since, as described below, many of the program's goals involve impacts during the summer of the program itself. These data also make it possible to identify and separate SYEP employment and earnings from other employment and earnings.²⁷

Roadmap to the Report

The following chapters discuss the findings from the two components of this study. First, Chapter 2 describes the SYEP program model and how the model has changed over time. Chapter 3 then provides a detailed discussion of how the program is implemented, describing each step from planning and management to young people's work experiences. Chapter 4 describes the method and sample used for the impact analysis. Chapter 5 presents the main impact findings, including impacts during the application summer and impacts on employment, earnings, and education after five years. Chapter 6 takes a deeper look by examining impacts after nine years for young people who applied to SYEP for the summer of 2006, and by exploring whether the program had different impacts on young people who were of different ages when they applied, or on young people who applied in different years. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of the implications of the implementation and impact findings for policy and practice, as well as for future research.

²⁷Although the employment data are more detailed than those used in previous studies of SYEP, they are not universally better. While the data used by Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015) cover employment and earnings from jobs across the United States, the data used in the present study cover only employment and earnings from jobs in New York State.

Chapter 2

Overview of the Summer Youth Employment Program

Started in 1963, New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is currently the largest summer jobs program in the United States. SYEP is often described as a rite of passage for young New Yorkers, as generations of teens and young adults have gotten their first jobs through the program. Between 2004 and 2015, the program placed between 25,000 and 50,000 teens and young adults in subsidized minimum-wage jobs each summer, with the number of annual applications to the program recently exceeding 120,000. The program has largely relied on city and state funds since 2000, when the Workforce Investment Act took effect and dedicated federal funding for summer jobs programs ended.

For many years, SYEP’s primary objective was to provide jobs to young people who might not otherwise have access to work opportunities, partly to keep them busy and out of trouble when they were not in school. The program has evolved in several ways since 2003, when the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) became the lead agency for the city’s youth employment programs and began to administer SYEP. The agency took steps to diversify job opportunities, to better match young people’s career interests and to meet their developmental needs by providing training in work readiness and other life skills. This chapter describes the SYEP model administered by DYCD, and major changes to the program’s model in the last decade.

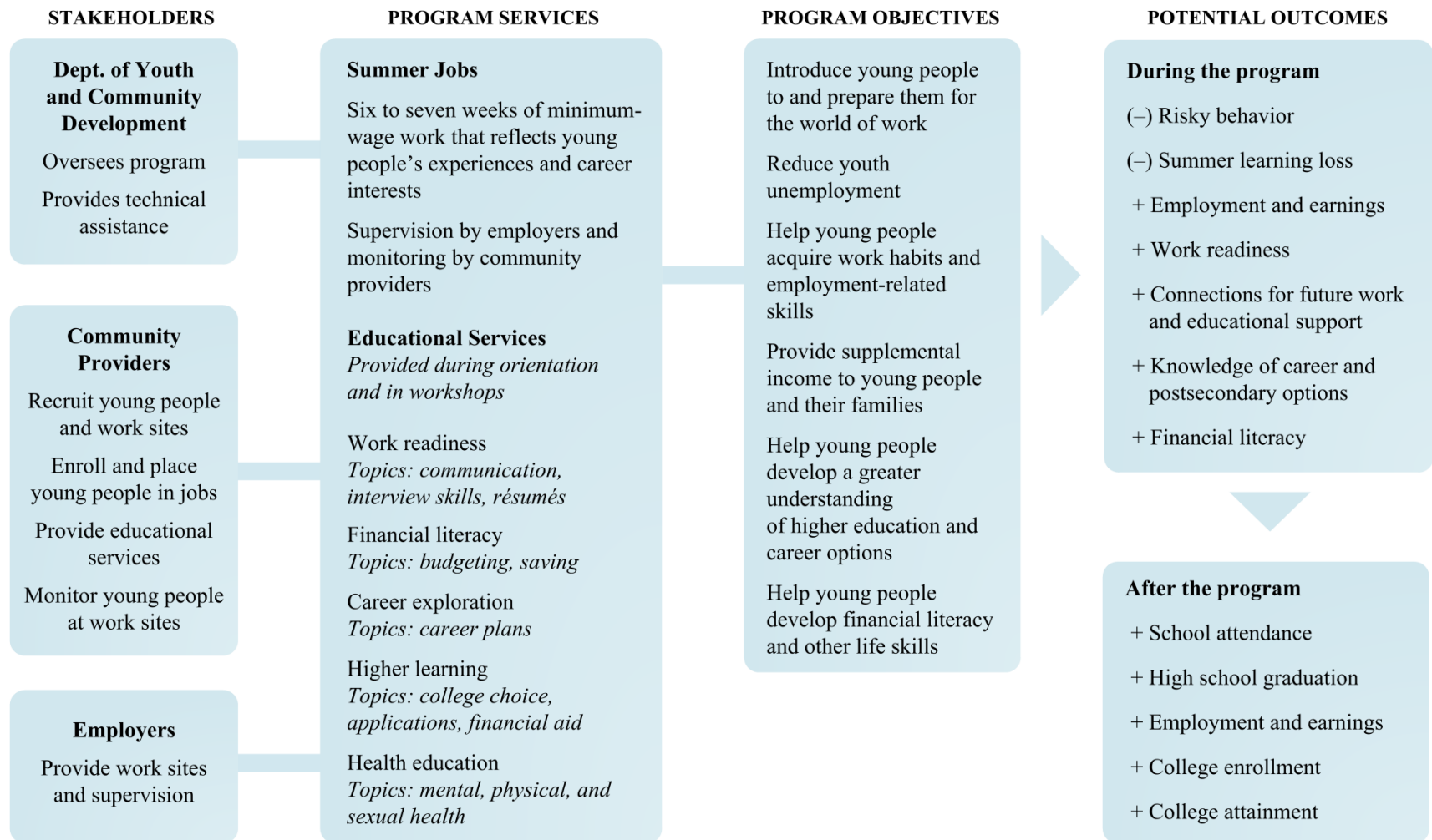
The SYEP Model and Its Objectives

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the services offered by SYEP, and the objectives and potential outcomes associated with those services. As the second column of the figure shows, the program offers two main services for young people between the ages of 14 and 24:

- **Minimum-wage, entry-level jobs** with public and private employers across the city. SYEP seeks to place young people in jobs that reflect their “experiences and interests.”¹
- **Educational services** on work readiness, career exploration, financial literacy, personal health, and postsecondary (college) education. DYCD has developed a standard curriculum that outlines topics and activities in each of these five areas.

¹New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (2015).

Figure 2.1
SYEP Program Model and Objectives



NOTE: Information about the model’s services and objectives are obtained from program documents created by New York City’s Department of Youth and Community Development, which also informed the list of expected outcomes created by MDRC.

As shown in the first column of the figure, the program requires cooperation among DYCD, the community-based providers that implement the services, and the employers that provide work sites for participants.

- **The community providers** include multiservice social agencies, community colleges, economic development agencies, and other types of organizations that focus on workforce development and youth development.² DYCD allocates program slots and the associated funding to providers based on their organizational capabilities and their communities' needs (the number of low-income young people in the area, for example). The providers serve as intermediaries among young people, employers, and DYCD: they recruit employers and young people for the program, place young people in jobs, provide them with educational services, and monitor their progress throughout the summer. Providers are encouraged to plan work sites and educational activities around the scheduling needs of young people and employers, and are allowed to offer weekend services. One important goal is that they are supposed to make it possible for young people to work even if they have to attend summer school.

Providers are required to visit work sites at least once a week to monitor compliance with workplace-safety and supervision requirements, to collect timesheets, and to check with young people and their supervisors about their experiences and needs. For the educational component, providers are required to cover all of the topics in the DYCD curriculum, though they have flexibility to adapt the content and the activities to the “specific needs and interests” of their communities and young people.³

- **Employer staff members at the work sites** are responsible for supervising SYEP young people at their jobs from day to day. DYCD requires work sites to have at least one supervisor for every 12 participants; that person is expected to “provide direction, training, and counseling” to the young people, as well as formal feedback on their work at least twice during the program.⁴
- **DYCD** provides training and technical support to the service providers to help them recruit and screen work sites. The agency also carries out a range

²More than 60 community-based organizations served as SYEP service providers between 2006 and 2015. There was some turnover in providers when DYCD awarded new contracts in 2009 and in 2013. About 50 providers worked with SYEP each year, on average.

³New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (2015).

⁴New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (2015).

of oversight and monitoring activities, including visits to the service providers and work sites during the program.

As described in the third column of Figure 2.1, the immediate goals of the program are to introduce young people to the world of work, to provide them with income, and to reduce youth unemployment in the city during the summer. In the long run, the program seeks to “facilitate the long-term employment and self-sufficiency of youth” by helping them to: (1) acquire professional skills, habits, and networks; (2) develop a greater understanding of the higher education and career options available to them; and (3) build life skills and financial capabilities for their transition to adulthood.⁵ While SYEP does not set explicit objectives to improve the immediate educational outcomes of young people in secondary schools, participating in a structured, constructive program may help address summer learning loss. The summer income may also reduce young people’s need to work during the school year and allow them to better engage in school.

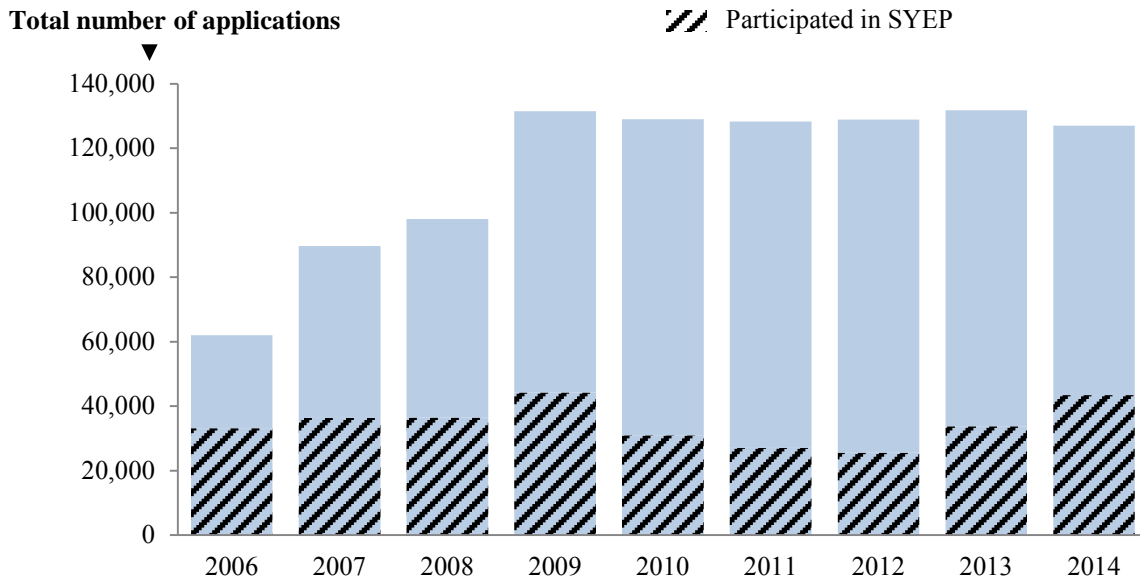
How SYEP Has Evolved

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and explained in more detail in Chapter 4, MDRC’s analysis to assess SYEP’s effects focuses on a sample of young people who first applied to the program between 2006 and 2010. Figure 2.2 shows that there was only one major change to the program during those years. In 2009, when the program received federal funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to combat the effects of the Great Recession, the age limit for SYEP eligibility was raised from 21 to 24 years. Even before eligibility for the program was expanded, yearly applications to SYEP had increased dramatically in the early years of the recession.

There were no changes to the duration or intensity of services the program offered during that time, however. Between 2006 and 2012, all participants were eligible to work up to 25 hours a week for up to seven consecutive weeks. Providers were expected to dedicate at least 10 percent of the total program hours (about 17.5 hours over the seven weeks) to educational services, which included an orientation during the first week of participation and workshops on the DYCD curriculum topics. Participants were paid for the hours spent on all educational activities, including the orientation.

⁵New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (2015).

Figure 2.2
How SYEP Has Changed Since 2006



| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Minimum wage | \$6.75 | \$7.15 | \$7.25 | \$8.00 |
| Age limit | 14-21 years old | | 14-24 years old | |
| Duration | 7 weeks | | | 6 weeks |
| Maximum paid hours during program | <p><u>For all ages</u> 25 hours a week. 10 percent of total program hours must be spent on educational services, including an orientation and educational workshops.</p> | | | <p><u>Ages 14-15</u> 20 hours a week, 5 of which are to be spent on education.</p> <p><u>Ages 16-24</u> 25 hours a week with no educational requirements after placement.</p> |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTE: Participation is defined as working in a job placement, attending orientation, or attending educational workshops.

DYCD introduced several changes to the program in 2013. The duration of the program was reduced from seven weeks to six weeks, in an effort to serve a greater share of the applicants. The program also began to differentiate service requirements for younger and older participants. Starting in 2013, the program offered up to 20 hours of paid work experience to 14- and 15-year-old participants, which included five hours of educational services each week, and allowed providers to place these younger participants in community service and service-learning projects for their work experience (as many employers are reluctant to hire young people under the age of 16).⁶ Participants between the ages of 16 and 24 could still work up to 25 hours a week, and they were no longer required to participate in educational activities. Participants in both age groups were required to attend an unpaid orientation, which lasts four hours for the younger participants and eight hours for the older ones, and which includes abbreviated work-readiness and other educational activities to prepare them to start their jobs. Tying job placement to a mandatory orientation was an attempt to ensure that young people participate in the educational activities before starting work.

To better understand the implementation of the SYEP services described in this chapter, MDRC collected data from providers, participants, and a handful of employers in the summer and fall of 2015. The data collection focused on the experiences of the young people, providers, and employers that year, but also explored how SYEP services have evolved over time. While the data do not allow a rigorous assessment of SYEP implementation in the years before 2015, the findings presented in the next chapter generally reflect how the program operated from 2006 to 2010 and provide some context for the impact findings discussed in the second half of the report.

⁶Service-learning projects integrate community service with classroom instruction and reflection.

Chapter 3

The Implementation of the Summer Youth Employment Program

The main objective of this evaluation's implementation study is to describe how the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) works on the ground, including the strategies and challenges involved in implementing the program and the factors that influence the experiences of participants. The analysis uses various qualitative and quantitative data sources, including interviews and focus groups with more than 90 SYEP participants from the summer of 2015, interviews with 30 young people who applied but did not participate, information gathered from providers through qualitative interviews and an electronic survey, and interviews with a handful of work-site representatives.¹

The implementation analysis shows that young people can have very different experiences in the program depending on their providers and work sites. The factors that influence implementation and young people's experiences include:

- **The scale of the program.** The largest summer jobs program in the country, SYEP has placed between 25,000 and 50,000 young people in jobs at thousands of work sites each summer between 2006 and 2016 — an accomplishment that requires considerable effort from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the service providers. The scale of the program makes it challenging to provide every young person who participates with meaningful work experiences that offer opportunities to build skills or relationships.
- **Workplace characteristics.** The thousands of SYEP work sites across the city include public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses of varying sizes, organizational characteristics, and labor needs. Since par-

¹Focus groups with 72 SYEP participants were conducted toward the end of the summer at eight provider organizations in four of the five boroughs of New York City. MDRC also interviewed the SYEP directors at these organizations about program implementation and changes to SYEP over the years. These conversations informed the development of a survey that was e-mailed to the SYEP director at each of the 47 community-based provider organizations that operated the program in 2015. An SYEP management staff person from each of 40 of the organizations responded to the survey (a response rate of 85 percent). Between September and November of 2015, MDRC conducted individual telephone interviews with 20 more young people who participated in the program that summer and 30 young people who applied but did not participate. MDRC aimed to conduct focus groups and interviews with young people who were of various ages, who were of both genders, who had applied to various service providers, and who had worked in various types of jobs.

ticipants spend most of their SYEP hours at work sites, these employers' characteristics and cultures have a great influence on young people's experiences.

- **Provider characteristics.** Provider organizations are diverse in their sizes, staffing, and portfolios of services; have different partners and employers available in their communities; and attempt to place varying numbers of SYEP participants. All of these characteristics affect their ability to deliver services.
- **The amount of funding available each year and the timing of that funding.** In the absence of steady federal funding for summer youth employment programs after 2000, SYEP has relied on city and state funding, which have fluctuated from year to year. Because New York City generally reaches budget agreements in June, SYEP's final funding commitment is often not known until weeks before the program begins, affecting the providers' ability to plan services. In 2016, the city committed to a baseline budget to serve 60,000 young people each summer, which is expected to help DYCD and the providers better plan for the program in advance.

The rest of this chapter illustrates how these factors affect different stages of the program, using examples and information shared by providers and participants.

Work-Site Identification and Screening, Provider Staffing, and Participant Recruitment

- **Identifying and screening job placements for nearly 50,000 young people is an enormous undertaking that requires considerable planning and coordination among DYCD, providers, and employers.**

To be ready for placements in July, service providers and DYCD work during the first half of the year to identify and screen work sites, hire and train staff members, and recruit potential participants. Given its long history in the city, SYEP has an existing infrastructure on which the program is built each year, and providers reported working with many of the same employers and community partners from year to year. However, providers often do not know the exact number of summer jobs their funding will cover until weeks, or even days, before the program starts. This fact makes it difficult to identify work sites and plan staffing. For example, in 2015, the New York City Council added additional funding for SYEP in early July, which led providers to scramble after the program started. A program director at one of the provider organizations said: "Our baseline number was 685 [young people]. Then the city gets more

funding and all of the sudden it's 1,300. We were ready for 685, but it's almost impossible to duplicate work sites on the fly when your participants double. This seems to happen every year and the problem repeats itself.”

- **Although providers aim to have variety of types of jobs available for participants, their ability to do so is often limited by the staffing needs and preferences of employers in their communities.**

Camps and day care programs make up a large share of SYEP work sites because these employers rely on SYEP for temporary workers during the summer when more families are looking for affordable child care options. For example, the director of an organization running a day care program in Queens said:

I'm not going to be able to survive if I can't have summer youth.... We try to control the cost for the summer [day care] program and are one of the cheapest programs around because the community cannot absorb much more [in terms of cost]. And we're able to do that because of summer youth. We're able to have them really participate and deliver on the objectives and goals for the summer. Without them, I don't know what we'd do.

On the other hand, many for-profit businesses may not have the need to hire a large number of temporary workers during the summer. “You get the ‘mom-and-pops,’” one provider in Brooklyn noted, “but they don't take the numbers.” Many providers have work sites outside of their communities and boroughs. However, since most young people apply to providers in their own communities and have limitations or preferences regarding how far they are willing to travel, providers focus their employer recruitment efforts in their communities and surrounding areas, often relying on personal connections and word-of-mouth referrals.

Some providers also struggle to recruit enough work sites, especially in geographic areas where there are multiple SYEP providers. DYCD assigns funding for summer jobs based on need — that is, the number of low-income and unemployed young people in a community. However, many of these communities also lack jobs or large employers, creating competition among providers. One provider in the Bronx observed: “There are about 10 agencies in the Bronx that do summer youth.... They are fighting over sites.” Nearly all of the provider organizations operate their own SYEP work sites, often employing participants as camp counselors or clerical staff in their organizations.

- **Providers and DYCD rely on seasonal staff members to implement many SYEP services and to administer the program.**

Staffing a large, but short program can present challenges. While a handful of permanent staff members devote time to SYEP planning all year long, all providers rely on temporary workers — typically college students who need summer jobs — to run many aspects of the

program, including the recruitment and enrollment of young people, orientation and job placement, work-site monitoring, and the provision of educational services. Several of the providers said that they hire former SYEP participants since they are already familiar with the program and can relate to current participants.

DYCD also relies on seasonal workers, usually college students, to help provide technical assistance and oversight (for example, visiting work sites to conduct safety assessments and working on payroll). In recent years, about a dozen full-time staff members at the agency have worked on SYEP.

- **While SYEP regularly has more applicants than positions overall, individual providers still have to recruit enough applicants to fill their summer jobs.**

Nearly all of the providers who responded to MDRC's survey said that they conduct active outreach to recruit applicants. Most are recruited through word-of-mouth referrals from their families or friends, or referrals from schools. Many of the providers are also well-known in their communities and provide other services to applicants and their families. "A lot of these kids are with the providers for purposes other than SYEP, and that's a big part of where the recruitment starts on the ground," said one DYCD administrator. DYCD also conducts online outreach and sends e-mails to previous applicants.

The Selection, Enrollment, and Placement of Young People

- **While providers try to match young people to jobs based on their interests and preferences, it is impossible to do so for all or even most participants given the limited work-site options available and the speed with which so many young people must be placed.**

The application period typically begins in March and closes at the end of April, when DYCD starts running lotteries to select participants. Providers e-mail or make calls to notify young people who are selected by the lottery. Upon notification, a young person must provide documents verifying his or her age, address, work eligibility, and household income within five business days to complete the application and enroll in the program. Because many young people either do not respond on time or decline the offer, lotteries continue to run throughout May and June, and even after the program starts in July, to select young people to fill all available jobs. In 2015, when the city council added additional funding for SYEP in early July, providers enrolled new young people and placed them into jobs throughout July and in some cases into August, in the final weeks of program operation.

During enrollment, providers interview young people about their work histories and interests, in an effort to make matches that reflect their interest and experiences. Some invite employers during orientation or host separate job fairs to introduce young people to employers before they are placed. However, in placing hundreds to thousands of young people each summer, providers cannot accommodate the choices and needs of every one of them.

- **When a young person enrolls can greatly affect that person’s chances of getting a preferred work-site placement and that person’s overall experience.**

Young people who enroll later in the program cycle have fewer work-site options to choose from. In the words of one provider staff member: “The first 100 or 150 people are more likely to get what they want because they are earlier in the process. The later you come in the process, the slimmer the pickings.” A number of young people who participated in focus groups and interviews in 2015 did not get their primary choices for work sites because they enrolled later in the cycle. Some reported receiving very brief orientations before placement, as providers generally hold large, group orientations on work readiness and offer other educational services in June.

Providers and employers interviewed for the implementation study reported that many jobs require additional screening, such as medical clearance, background checks, or interviews. For example, hospitals can require physical examinations and immunization records, and some day care centers that hire young people to work with teachers take into account an applicant’s academic proficiency. Since SYEP is a short program, it cannot accommodate a lengthy screening and interview process for those who enroll later in the cycle.

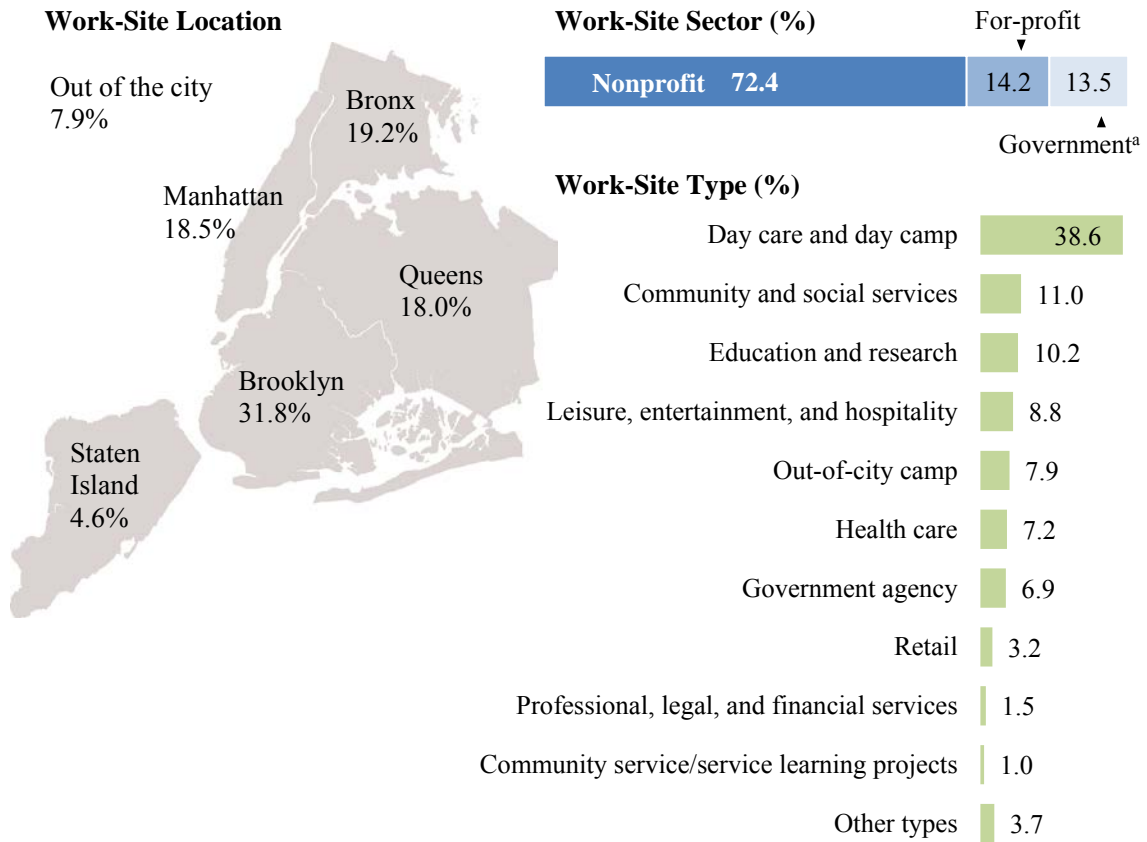
Young People’s Work-Site Experiences

- **Most of the young people who participate in SYEP work for nonprofit organizations during the summer, but they may work in many different industries.**

Figure 3.1 shows the sector and industry breakdown of work sites among young people who participated in SYEP between 2006 and 2014. Nearly three-quarters of these young people (73 percent) worked for nonprofit organizations during their summer jobs, 14 percent worked

Figure 3.1

Work-Site Characteristics of SYEP Participants, 2006-2014



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Participation is defined as working in a job placement, attending orientation, or attending educational workshops. Work-site characteristics are based on the last placement of each participant. Only about 2 percent of the participants were placed at more than one work site during 2008-2014, the years for which data are available.

^aWork sites in the government sector include public schools and libraries as well as government agencies.

for government agencies, and 13 percent worked for for-profit businesses.² About half of the SYEP participants during this period (46 percent) worked in summer camps or day care programs, including a small percentage who were placed in camps outside of the city. The rest of the placements were fairly evenly distributed among community-based and social service organizations, education and research firms, government agencies, health care organizations, and work sites that are categorized as leisure, entertainment, and hospitality.

- **The tasks young people perform and the opportunities they receive to build skills and relationships vary widely from work site to work site, even within the same industry and sector.**

Young people often work as counselors or teachers' assistants in camps or day care programs, or in clerical and maintenance roles in a wide array of industries. Conversations with participants and employers in 2015 revealed that young people's experiences can vary greatly from work site to work site and that there were no "typical" experiences across the sectors (government, for-profit, or nonprofit) or industries. For example, interviews with staff members at four day care work sites in 2015 revealed that the work experiences they offered to SYEP participants were different and were shaped by the nature of their programs. At one of these day care sites, SYEP participants were classroom aides and assisted the teachers by helping to serve food to children and taking them on field trips. Another had a greater focus on performing arts and relied on SYEP participants to lead various types of creative efforts. The other two day care sites were more focused on academics and hired SYEP participants to assist teachers in the classroom by providing individual tutoring and instruction to children. Such variation in tasks and skill-building opportunities existed in other types of work sites in all three sectors. Box 3.1 describes the varied work experiences of several 2015 participants.

Most 2015 participants who contributed to the implementation analysis did not have many opportunities to learn so-called "hard" skills or technical skills related to specific jobs. However, a few reported learning transferable software skills such as Microsoft Excel when performing clerical work; and a couple reported learning job-specific technical skills like coding and video editing. Nearly all participants spoke about learning "soft" or work-readiness skills that are necessary at a workplace: showing up on time, being able to communicate with different personalities, managing time, and working in teams, among others. As one young person

²During this time, the share of participants working in the for-profit sector increased continuously, doubling from 9 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2014. The share working in the government sector declined from 16 percent in 2006 to 11 percent in 2014. The share working in the nonprofit sector remained relatively constant during this period, and was 70 percent in 2014.

Box 3.1

Stories of Some 2015 SYEP Participants

Between September and November of 2015, MDRC conducted focus groups and telephone interviews with more than 90 young people who participated in the program that year. The experiences of a few of the interviewees, whose real names are not used, are shared below. The vignettes illustrate the wide variation in SYEP experiences among 2015 participants.

Reggie, a 14-year-old from Manhattan, received his first job through SYEP in 2015. He was placed in a public housing complex where he performed cleanup tasks such as raking leaves and taking out garbage, with two other SYEP participants. Reggie described his experience as “fair.” He did not mind doing the physical work or working outside, but he would not go so far as to say that he liked it. He did not interact with the supervisor every day but there was someone in the office for him to report to. He said he “more or less” got along with the supervisor but would not be in touch in the future. He could not recall receiving visits from a monitor. He did not plan to work during the school year but did plan to apply to SYEP again.

James, a 16-year-old from Brooklyn, learned about SYEP at school and applied because he found it difficult to get work on his own as a teenager. The summer of 2015 was his first in SYEP and the job the program gave him was also his first; he wanted to work in retail and was placed in a large office-supply store, stocking supplies and providing customer service. James said that he learned customer-service and organizational skills, but did not have a positive experience overall because he did not get along with his supervisor. James relied on other employees at the store to show him how to do his work. He said he would apply to SYEP again if he could not find other retail work the following summer. He said SYEP should help young people find permanent jobs, and that it was difficult to find work during the school year that could accommodate his schedule.

Greg, a 17-year-old from Brooklyn, worked at a store owned by the same office-supply chain as James (above) in 2015. He was interested in finding a placement related to computer science, but he was selected late in the cycle and there were limited placement options available. At the store, he greeted customers and learned about packaging and merchandizing items. He enjoyed his work experience and said that he learned “how to be an exceptional employee.” He liked his supervisor, whom he described as “calm and collected,” as well as his coworkers. Greg had participated in SYEP in two previous summers, and had also worked in the city’s Department of Probation and at an arts organization. He said he enjoyed getting to experience different types of work and felt that the jobs had prepared him for the real workforce.

Donald, a 17-year-old from Queens, applied to SYEP for the first time in 2015 because he wanted to gain work experience instead of doing nothing over the summer. He was placed in a clerical role at a large apartment complex, where he handled and organized a lot of paperwork. Donald thought the experience was “all right.” He learned to pay attention to detail and liked the people he worked with. His supervisor was regularly available to provide

guidance and he would ask her for a reference for another job. Donald did not plan to look for work during the school year; he said he had been rejected from part-time work in retail because of his age. He planned to apply to SYEP again in the future.

Emily, an 18-year-old from the Bronx, had worked in SYEP two years in a row in order to save money for college. In 2015, she was placed in a clerical position in the accounting department of the SYEP provider organization where she applied. She said that accounting was not what she wanted to pursue in the future, but the job taught her “how to maintain organization, how valuable it is to maintain money” as well as “how to deal with multiple personalities that an office can carry.” She also learned about professional dress and how to behave in an office environment. She had worked at a day care in her previous SYEP placement, which led her to decide that she liked working with children and that she wanted to pursue a career in teaching. She said she had looked for jobs outside of SYEP but that there was a lot of competition.

Maria, a 19-year-old from the Bronx, applied to SYEP because she needed to acquire some work experience and had found it challenging to find a job without any. For example, she applied to a café and but was told that she did not “have enough experience to serve coffee.” In SYEP, she worked at a day camp. While child care was not her first choice and was not related to her major in college, she thought it was a good, “low-pressure” way to enter the world of work. She was not able to get her first choice — a job at a law firm — when she was placed during an orientation. She said she had learned how to communicate with children in her SYEP job.

Laura, a 20-year-old from Brooklyn, participated in SYEP in 2014 and 2015. She applied to SYEP because she found it very difficult to get a part-time job that worked with her college schedule. In 2015, she worked at a nonprofit company that taught students in disadvantaged communities how to write computer code. She really enjoyed the work and “never felt alone,” even though she had no coding experience. The organization trained her for her role as a teacher’s aide and the coworkers were very supportive. She said that she planned to do some volunteer work for the company and was considering changing her major from marketing to computer science. In 2014, Laura worked as an office assistant in a business improvement district; she was selected for the job after interviewing with the director of the organization during a SYEP orientation. Laura said that she learned Excel and communication skills at that job but that she liked the 2015 experience better because of the people she worked with. She was continuing to look for a part-time, entry-level customer-service job while she was in school, but “everyone [was] looking for at least six months of experience” or could not work with her school schedule.

said: “No matter how smart you are, you’re never going to get anywhere if you don’t know how to work with your peers.... [When] working with SYEP, you learn how to interact with people a lot better.”

Several young people also reported that their SYEP experiences boosted their confidence, broadened their perspectives, or led to some other form of personal growth. For example, an African-American young man reflected on his experience at a day camp where most of the children were Chinese-American: “I loved that job. I liked interacting with the kids. And the kids were Chinese-American.... Growing up, I was never around Chinese-American kids; I was always around black kids. It was great watching those kids learning stuff.” Another young man spoke about his work at a nursing and rehabilitation center: “It opened my eyes about the type of help that people need when they are disabled or they are old, [and] how we can treat them.”

- **The levels of supervision, mentoring, and support young people receive during their summer work experiences also vary quite widely among work sites and providers.**

Employer staff members are responsible for supervising SYEP participants. The level and quality of supervision young people receive on the job often reflect their employers’ organizational capabilities and staffing, as well as the number of young people at work sites. Supervisors at different work sites have varying capacity to spend time with young people and to mentor them. Most of the young people who participated in focus groups and interviews reported that they had cordial relationships with their work-site supervisors and said that they might request recommendations or references from them in the future. However, only a handful reported deeper connections that they believed were likely to last.

In emphasizing how much the supervision and work environment mattered, one young person who participated in SYEP twice said: “Last year, when I worked at the summer camp, no one knew my name. My supervisor didn’t know my name even on the last day. This year is different — the coworkers are great. Someone always looks for me at the job.” Like this participant, some other young people reported relying on support from coworkers who were not their formal supervisors, and in the absence of strong support from coworkers or supervisors, many SYEP participants turned to each other for support and networks.

Provider staff members known as monitors visit each work site at least once a week to check with a sample of young people and supervisors, and generally focus on ensuring participants’ regular participation, safety, and well-being. Monitors cannot check in with every young person at every work site they visit, especially if the sites employ a large number of participants. In the implementation study’s interviews and focus groups, young people generally reported having limited interactions with their monitors, and those mostly concerning timesheet collection; a few did not see their monitors regularly at all. Outside of these weekly monitoring visits, providers do not have regular interactions with most 16- to 24-year-old participants after they are placed in jobs, as the program stopped requiring educational workshops for young people in

this age range in 2013.³ A few 2015 participants reported contact with providers after they were placed, mostly to deal with issues and challenges at their work sites.

Educational Workshops

- **The delivery and quality of the educational workshops varied widely among providers and often depended on their ability to draw on existing organizational resources and partnerships in their communities.**

DYCD’s standard curriculum covers five areas — work readiness, financial literacy, career exploration, postsecondary education, and personal health — and provides topics and activities in each. For example, activities for interview preparation in the work-readiness module include preparing a “two-minute pitch” and practicing responses to a dozen typical interview questions. Providers are expected to cover the topics in the curriculum, but may adapt the activities and content to the specific needs and interests of their populations and communities.

A little more than half of the providers who responded to MDRC’s survey in 2015 reported that they adapt the curriculum by inviting guest speakers from their own organizations or other partner organizations in the community, using different instructional materials and activities, and covering additional topics such as voting and civic engagement, using social media and professional networks, and maintaining healthy relationships. The educational services are designed and implemented by different types of staff at the provider organizations, leading to variations in quality. For example, some providers have certified teachers, college counselors, or financial education advisers who deliver the educational services; many others rely on their seasonal staff members who may or may not have experience with such workshops or with the content.

On average, the 2015 participants who participated in interviews and focus groups thought that the educational activities provided during the orientation — which largely focused on work readiness and financial literacy — were helpful. In the words of one participant: “At the time, it doesn’t seem helpful because you just want to get through the orientation. But once you start working you realize [that what you learned in the orientation] stays in your mind.... I

³Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who participated between 2006 and 2010 — the span of the impact study — probably had more contact with providers when they attended educational workshops. As described in Chapter 2, DYCD introduced several changes to the program in 2013. Most providers approved of the change in the educational component (covering the required topics during a mandatory preprogram orientation instead of in workshops during the program period). While they had less contact with the older participants, most felt that the change allowed young people to work without interruptions and made scheduling easier for the employers.

need to do this, this, and this.” Another young person who had participated in SYEP the year before said that the way the information was delivered made a big difference: “[This year] it was a lot clearer. Last year, we got spoken to by someone our age. He gave us a lot of examples of things ... instead of just telling us what to do and what not to do. This year’s person explained things more clearly.”

Young people were less enthusiastic about the classroom-based educational workshops, which were only provided to 14- and 15-year-old participants after 2013 but were provided to all participants before then. For example, one young man said that his educational hours some weeks were spent writing essays or reflections for hours, which he did not find helpful, adding that the workshops “went over such basic stuff that everyone already knows.” Most young people who participated in the focus groups and interviews were not able to speak about the workshops in a detailed manner. Those who said that they found the workshops helpful typically spoke about the work-readiness and financial-education components. Some said that they had covered some of the topics, like sexual health, in their schools.

Conclusion

The implementation study included in this evaluation does not allow a full assessment of SYEP implementation in years before 2015 and was not designed to assess the variation in program implementation among SYEP providers or employers. However, the data provide a compelling picture of how the program works on the ground and the variation in participants’ experiences. SYEP is not a highly prescriptive program: the providers place tens of thousands of young people into entry-level summer jobs over six to seven weeks, and individual work-site staff members are primarily responsible for providing them with meaningful work experiences, supervision, and mentoring. As a result, young people’s opportunities to build skills and relationships that could help them succeed in school and the labor market in the long term varied from work site to work site, even within sectors and industries.

Young people who spoke to MDRC valued SYEP for different reasons: they felt that they learned social and interpersonal skills necessary in a professional environment, earned income of their own to buy school supplies or to save for college, and developed personally and socially in ways that are difficult to measure (for example, finding value in helping one’s community and understanding people from different backgrounds and cultures).

The next three chapters in this report assess whether the experiences described in this chapter led to improvements in participants’ employment, earnings, and educational outcomes.

Chapter 4

Impact Analysis Methods, Data, and Sample

The preceding chapters of this report discuss how the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is implemented. Beginning with this chapter, the second half of the report focuses on estimating the “impacts” of the SYEP program. The impacts represent the difference the program makes in the lives of young people. In other words, to what extent does the program lead to better outcomes for young people than they would have had without it? To estimate these impacts, the evaluation takes advantage of the lotteries that the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) uses as part of its admissions process. The analysis compares the outcomes of young people who won a place in the program through a lottery (the program group) with the outcomes of young people who applied to the program but did not win a place (the control group). The young people in the sample include those who applied to SYEP for the first time between 2006 and 2010.

Research Group Assignment and Analysis Methods

In each of the application years included in this analysis, many more young people applied to SYEP than could be served. To decide which applicants would be offered places in the program, DYCD used randomized lotteries. Each young person applied to one provider, which had a certain number of places to fill. A lottery process (consisting of a series of lotteries, as described below) was then conducted for that provider. Some providers also had program slots that were designated for young people with disabilities, who were entered into separate lotteries for those slots. Therefore, in a given year, each young person was entered into only one lottery process.¹ As discussed below, DYCD also ran a *secondary* lottery process for some providers during the program period; however, this analysis relies only on the outcomes of the *primary* lotteries to define research groups.

In a given year, each primary lottery process included a series of randomized lotteries. A first set of lottery winners was randomly selected in May, and young people who won places in the program were notified and were given five days to respond to the offer. Since many young people did not respond and a smaller number declined the offer, their places remained open and a second group of young people was randomly selected to fill them. This process was repeated until places were filled or the program period began, whichever happened first. Young

¹In a small number of cases, the number of young people who applied to a particular provider did not exceed the number of places that provider had available. Those cases were dropped from the analysis sample, as there are no control group members with whom they could be compared.

people who received an offer but did not respond within five days were put back into the pool of applicants for subsequent lotteries until they failed to respond three times, while young people who declined the offer were removed from the pool.

In this analysis, young people who won any randomized lottery in the primary lottery process are included in the program group, and young people who did not win any of those lotteries are included in the control group. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5, because many of the young people who won primary lotteries did not respond to the offer, many program group members did not actually participate in the program. Whether or not a young person actually participated in SYEP, if that person won a primary lottery, he or she is included in the program group.

Conversely, some young people who never won a primary lottery did in fact participate in SYEP. About halfway through the program period, the primary lotteries ended, and providers who still had open slots began contacting young people who remained on their applicant lists to ask if they were interested in participating. Once a small group of interested young people had been identified, DYCD would run a *secondary* lottery to select which of them would be offered places in the program. The data from DYCD's centralized lottery system do not include information about which applications were entered into these secondary lotteries. Therefore, this analysis relies only on the results from the *primary* lotteries to determine program and control group status. As a result, some control group young people (that is, those who did not win a primary lottery) participated in SYEP because they won places in the program in secondary lotteries.

In this analysis, each primary lottery process (that is, each series of lotteries conducted for each provider, including separate lotteries conducted for young people with disabilities) is treated as if it were a single lottery. This decision relies on the assumption that, within each provider/disability applicant pool (known as a lottery stratum), each young person had an equal probability of *never* winning a primary lottery, and therefore each young person also had an equal probability of *ever* winning a primary lottery.² Therefore, after accounting for lottery strata, one can expect that the program group members (who won primary lotteries) and the control group members (who did not win primary lotteries) had equivalent characteristics at the

²The analysis uses linear regression models to estimate the impacts of winning an SYEP lottery on the dependent variables of interest. The models include fixed effects to account for lottery strata and baseline covariates to improve the precision of the estimates. Covariates include gender, age, race/ethnicity, student status, earnings in the year before application (in the models estimating labor-market outcomes), and English proficiency and special-education eligibility (in the models estimating educational outcomes). Since a young person's probability of winning a primary lottery depended on his or her provider and disability status (or stratum), the regression models used to estimate the impacts of SYEP include provider/disability status fixed effects.

time they applied. Any differences that emerge between the two groups over time can be attributed with confidence to SYEP.

Most of the results presented in this report show the impacts of *being offered a slot* in SYEP (that is, winning a place in the program through a lottery) rather than the impacts of *participating* in the program. These are known as “intent-to-treat” impact estimates. Where it is helpful in the interpretation of the size of the impacts, the discussion includes estimates of the impacts of actually participating in the program, known as “complier average causal effect” estimates.

Young people were able to apply for SYEP in any year in which they were eligible, which meant that many young people applied in multiple years. If a young person chose to reapply to SYEP, that person’s likelihood of winning a lottery was independent of whether he or she had won a lottery in a previous year. In other words, a person was no more or less likely to win a second time if that person had won a lottery in a previous year. Because they could apply multiple times, some young people won a lottery in one year but not in another. Instead of including such individuals in both the program and control groups, to simplify the interpretation of the results the analysis includes each individual in the sample only once, in the first year that person applied. A sample member is assigned to the program group or the control group based only on that person’s primary lottery result in the first year the person applied; the individual’s research group status does not change even if he or she had the opposite result in subsequent lotteries. For example, if a young person first applied in 2007 and did not win a primary lottery in that year, that person is included in the control group, even if he or she applied again in 2008 and won a primary lottery that year. In other words, the sample is limited to first-time applicants only and the analysis examines the impacts of winning a slot in a primary lottery as a *first-time applicant*. Chapter 5 explores the contrast between the services received by the program and control groups, and in that context discusses both groups’ cumulative rates of participation in SYEP over the five-year follow-up period.

Although this decision to limit the sample simplifies the interpretation of results, it also limits how generalizable the findings are. The findings from this analysis do not represent the impacts of winning an SYEP slot after the first application, and thus do not represent SYEP’s impacts on all winners in a given year.

Data and Measures

The main impact analysis, presented in Chapter 5, examines SYEP’s impacts on employment and earnings during the summer for which young people first applied to the program, and on employment, earnings, and education in the five years thereafter. Chapter 6 explores further, presenting (1) an analysis of impacts on employment and earnings after nine years for young

people who applied to SYEP in 2006, and (2) subgroup analyses examining how the impacts vary for young people who were of different ages when they applied and for those who applied in different years.

These analyses use several data sources. First, DYCD provided data on applicants' characteristics, lottery results, and participation in SYEP. Specifically, sample members' applications to SYEP provide information on their characteristics when they first applied to the program: their age, race, and gender; whether they were enrolled in school; and whether they had disabilities. DYCD also provided data indicating whether sample members won an SYEP lottery in a given year and data on participation in SYEP, including earnings from SYEP jobs. These data reveal the rates at which both the program and control groups participated in the program and the earnings they received from SYEP during the summer of that first lottery and in the following years.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) provided data on young people's high school attendance and graduation in New York City as well as their enrollment in and graduation from two- and four-year colleges across the United States.³ These data are only available for sample members who were students in publicly funded New York City schools at some point during the study period. (The quality of the match between the DOE data and the sample is discussed below.) Finally, quarterly records from the New York State Department of Labor are used to measure employment and earnings in jobs that are not part of SYEP. These data only include jobs located in New York State that are covered by unemployment insurance, a definition which covers most "on-the-books" jobs. Jobs located outside of New York State and informal jobs like babysitting or other "off-the-books" jobs are not included.

Sample Characteristics

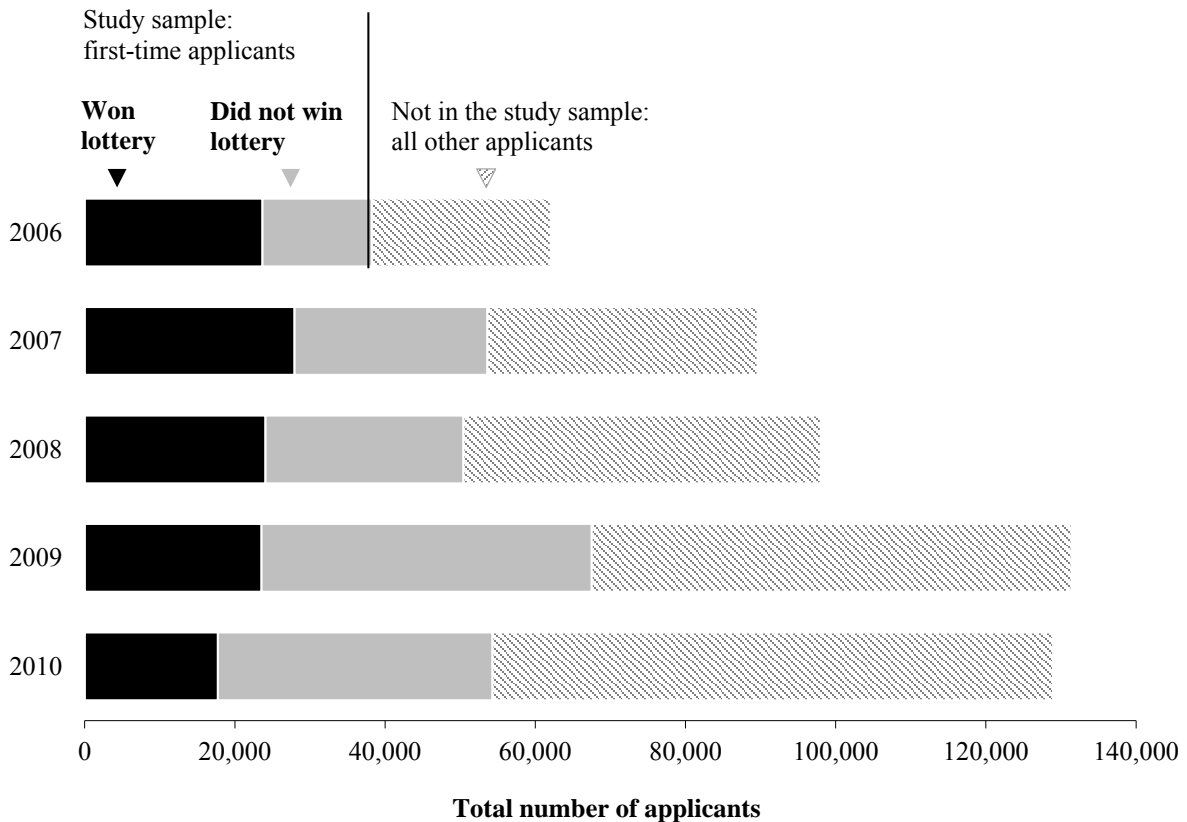
To participate in SYEP, a young person must be a resident of New York City, be registered with the Selective Service System (if male and age 18 or older), and fall within the specified age range for that year. As discussed above, the age range was either 14 to 21 or 14 to 24, depending on the year.

The sample for this study includes 264,075 young people who applied to SYEP for the first time between 2006 and 2010.⁴ Figure 4.1 shows the number of sample members for each

³The data on enrollment and graduation from colleges originally come from the National Student Clearinghouse. DOE collects the data and matches them to New York City school district data.

⁴Data on applicants from 2005 through 2009 were used to identify and exclude young people who had previously applied to SYEP. It is possible that some young people who applied in 2004 or before, but not in
(continued)

Figure 4.1
Sample Used for the Impact Analysis



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

year in the study period and how that number compares with the total number of applicants that were entered into lotteries in those years. As the figure shows, in some years the sample used in this study includes no more than half of the total applicants, as a large proportion were not applying for the first time. However, most of these multiyear applicants (about 88 percent) are

2005, are included in the analytic sample. However, an estimate based on the number of young people who skipped application years from 2005 through 2010 suggests that, at most, about 6 percent of the sample may be repeat applicants. In addition, about 3 percent of first-time applicants were excluded from the sample because they were included in special programs and bypassed the lottery, because their applications were incomplete or withdrawn and they did not enter any lotteries, or because they were missing identifiers and could not be matched to follow-up data.

included in the sample in the first year that they applied. In addition, the baseline characteristics of the study sample are very similar to those of the entire pool of applicants taken together, except that the study sample is younger (an expected difference since applicants were at their youngest the first time they applied). (Appendix Table A.1 compares the characteristics of the study sample with those of all applicants, including repeat applicants.)

Table 4.1 shows selected baseline characteristics of the program and control groups — that is, their characteristics when they applied to SYEP for the first time.⁵ The top panel of the table shows baseline characteristics among the full sample used in the analysis of SYEP participation and the analysis of the program’s impacts on employment and earnings. As expected given the random nature of the lotteries, although there are a few statistically significant differences between the program and control groups, these differences are very small. For example, 11.8 percent of program group members were employed in the year before they applied to SYEP, compared with 12.2 percent of control group members, a difference of only 0.4 percentage points. In addition, an equal proportion, 87.9 percent, of program and control group members were matched to at least one employment record from the New York State Department of Labor. The second panel shows education-related baseline characteristics among the sample used in the analysis of impacts on education outcomes; this sample is limited to those who were matched to DOE data, meaning that they were in publicly funded New York City schools at some point during the study period. Sixty-eight percent of the program group and 67 percent of the control group were matched to those data. This difference is significantly different (p-value < 0.001), but very small. Within the education analysis sample, there are no significant differences between research groups with respect to the baseline measures available.

As Table 4.1 shows, more than half of sample members were in their early teens (14 or 15 years old) and nearly 30 percent were teens (16 or 17 years old) when they first applied to SYEP, while a smaller proportion (19 percent) were older teens or young adults. This age distribution is not surprising given that the sample includes first-time applicants only, causing the sample to skew younger, and that SYEP generally receives more applications from younger teens. A little more than half of the study sample is female (54 percent) and most of its members are either black (43 percent) or Hispanic (31 percent). The vast majority of sample members were in high school or below (86 percent), while smaller proportions were in college (7 percent) or not in school (7 percent). Sample members appear to have had little formal work experience, as only about 12 percent had been employed in unemployment insurance-covered jobs in New York State in the year before they applied. Data for those in New York City schools suggest that many were behind in school (28 percent were old relative to their expected grade)

⁵These results are regression-adjusted to account for lottery strata.

Table 4.1**Baseline Characteristics of Sample Members, 2006-2010**

| Characteristic (%) | Program Group | Control Group | Estimated Difference | P-Value |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------|
| <u>Characteristics among the full study sample</u> | | | | |
| Age | | | | * 0.035 |
| 14-15 | 52.4 | 52.2 | 0.2 | |
| 16-17 | 28.6 | 28.4 | 0.2 | |
| 18-24 | 18.9 | 19.4 | -0.4 | |
| Male | 46.0 | 45.8 | 0.2 | 0.308 |
| Race | | | | 0.184 |
| Hispanic | 30.5 | 30.6 | -0.1 | |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 43.5 | 43.2 | 0.3 | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 12.2 | 12.1 | 0.1 | |
| Asian | 8.4 | 8.5 | -0.1 | |
| Other | 5.5 | 5.6 | -0.2 | |
| Borough | | | | * 0.020 |
| Bronx | 25.2 | 25.1 | 0.1 | |
| Brooklyn | 37.8 | 37.6 | 0.2 | |
| Manhattan | 13.0 | 13.3 | -0.3 | |
| Queens | 19.2 | 19.2 | 0.0 | |
| Staten Island | 4.8 | 4.8 | 0.0 | |
| Educational status | | | | *** 0.001 |
| High school or below | 86.3 | 85.9 | 0.4 | |
| Left high school before graduating | 1.9 | 2.0 | -0.1 | |
| High school graduate, not attending school | 3.0 | 3.2 | -0.2 | |
| High school equivalency recipient, not attending school | 1.8 | 1.9 | -0.1 | |
| College student | 7.0 | 6.9 | 0.1 | |
| Employed in the year before SYEP application ^a | 11.8 | 12.2 | -0.4 | ** 0.009 |
| Earnings in the year before SYEP application ^a (\$) | 494 | 500 | -6 | 0.790 |

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

| Characteristic (%) | Program Group | Control Group | Estimated Difference | P-Value |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|---------|
| Characteristics among the education impact sample^b | | | | |
| Eligible for free or reduced-price student lunch or receiving public assistance | 79.4 | 79.6 | -0.1 | 0.519 |
| English language learner ^c | 6.5 | 6.5 | 0.0 | 0.782 |
| Has an IEP ^d | 16.3 | 16.2 | 0.1 | 0.405 |
| Average grade level | 9.4 | 9.4 | 0.0 | 0.676 |
| Old for grade level | 27.5 | 27.8 | -0.3 | 0.134 |
| In high school | 76.0 | 76.0 | 0.0 | 0.982 |
| Graduated from high school ^e | 9.5 | 9.7 | -0.2 | 0.251 |
| Sample size (total = 264,075) | 116,919 | 147,156 | | |

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, the New York City Department of Education (DOE), and the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL).

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted for lottery strata.

^aEmployment and earnings measures were calculated using data provided by NYSDOL. In both the program and control groups, 87.9 percent of sample members matched to at least one employment record in those data. Individuals in the sample (which was limited to those with valid Social Security numbers) who did not match to any employment records are assumed to have had no employment or earnings that would be captured by New York State unemployment insurance records during the years for which data are available.

^bThe sample used to estimate impacts on education outcomes includes only those individuals who matched to DOE data in the baseline school year, and DOE only has data on students who were in publicly funded New York City schools at that time: 67.8 percent of the study sample program group and 66.8 percent of the control group. This difference between the program and control groups is statistically significant (p-value < 0.001), but very small.

^cEnglish language learners are students who are learning English in addition to their native languages.

^dAn Individualized Education Program (IEP) is an education plan for students with disabilities who are eligible for special education.

^eIncludes young people matched to DOE data in any school year: 77.8 percent of the study sample program group and 77.0 percent of the control group. The difference in match rates between the program and control groups is statistically significant (p-value < 0.001), but very small.

and a large proportion were from low-income families, as 80 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches or were receiving public assistance.

The study sample's characteristics do not look very different from those of all New York City young people of these ages during this time period. For example, data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that 12 percent of New York City young people of these ages reported having worked over a one-year period.⁶ However, there are some differences. For example, sample members are more likely to be black than New York City young people as a whole (43 percent compared with 27 percent), and less likely to be white (12 percent compared with 27 percent) or Asian (8 percent compared with 12 percent). In addition, the SYEP sample members who were in city schools appear to be slightly more educationally and economically disadvantaged, on average, than New York City young people as a whole. Only about 22 percent of New York City DOE first-time ninth-graders were old for their grade and only 75 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunches.

⁶Characteristics for all New York City young people were calculated using data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey. See Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren (2015).

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Chapter 5

Participation in the Summer Youth Employment Program and Its Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Education

As discussed in previous chapters, the immediate goals of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) include introducing young people to the world of work and to a wide range of careers, providing supplemental income to young people and their families, and reducing youth unemployment during the summer. In addition to these short-term goals, SYEP may also help young people gain work experience and soft skills, build connections, and come to understand the importance of education, all of which could lead to positive longer-term impacts on their employment and education. This chapter examines differences between the program and control groups' rates of participation in SYEP and assesses whether the program did have impacts on applicants' employment and earnings during the summer when they first applied, or on their employment, earnings, and educational outcomes in the five years that followed.

The analysis shows that SYEP dramatically increased employment and earnings during the initial summer by offering jobs to young people who were unlikely to work otherwise, indicating that SYEP met its central objectives of providing supplemental income to New York City families and reducing youth unemployment during the summer. However, SYEP did not have any meaningful impacts on employment or educational outcomes in the five years that followed.

Participation in SYEP During the Application Summer

This section examines young people's participation in SYEP during the summer immediately following their first application to SYEP, hereafter referred to as the "application summer." A young person is considered to have participated in SYEP if that person received a payment from the program. During the years covered by this study, such payments were made for participating in orientation, working in job placements, and participating in educational workshops.

- **Although not all program group members participated in SYEP, and a small percentage of control group members did, winning an SYEP lottery had a large, statistically significant impact on a young person's probability of participating in the program.**

Sixty-seven percent of program group members and 6 percent of control group members participated in SYEP during the application summer. Among those who participated in

SYEP (in both the program and control groups), the average number of weeks worked was just below six and the average amount earned was \$1,020.¹

It is not surprising that a substantial proportion of program group members did not participate. As described in previous chapters, a young person who won an SYEP lottery typically had only five days to respond to the program offer. It is likely that some young people who were selected by the lottery could not be reached in that time, or missed the window to respond. Additionally, some young people may have found other summer opportunities during the months between when they applied (in March and April) and when they were notified of their selection (typically between May and July). Box 5.1 recounts the stories of three young people who applied to SYEP in 2015 but did not participate in the program.

It is also not surprising that a small number of control group members did participate. As discussed in Chapter 4, if providers had unfilled slots after the primary lotteries were finished — which occurred about midway through the program — DYCD conducted secondary lotteries for only a limited number of interested young people. Since this study relies on the primary lotteries to determine whether a young person is included in the program group or the control group, young people who did not win primary lotteries but who participated in SYEP because they won secondary lotteries are included in the control group. Therefore, some members of the control group did participate in SYEP.

Impacts on Employment and Earnings During the Application Summer

Figure 5.1 shows SYEP's impacts on employment and earnings during the application summer. SYEP employment and earnings were estimated using data from the Department of Youth and Community Development, and all other employment and earnings were estimated using data from the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL). Total employment is made up of SYEP jobs and all other employment recorded by these sources; the same definition is used for total earnings.² The bars to the left in the figure show average total employment, and the bars to

¹The maximum time a young person could work was seven weeks, and the maximum amount that a young person could earn ranged from \$1,181 in 2006 to \$1,269 in 2009 and 2010, depending on the minimum wage.

²The wage data from NYSDOL include only formal employment in which the employer had to pay unemployment insurance benefits for employees. Informal employment and other summer job programs that were not required to submit wage data to NYSDOL may not be represented in this data set, and therefore employment rates may be underestimated if young people participated in other programs or had informal employment that would not have been reported.

Box 5.1

Stories of Some 2015 SYEP Applicants Who Did Not Participate in the Program

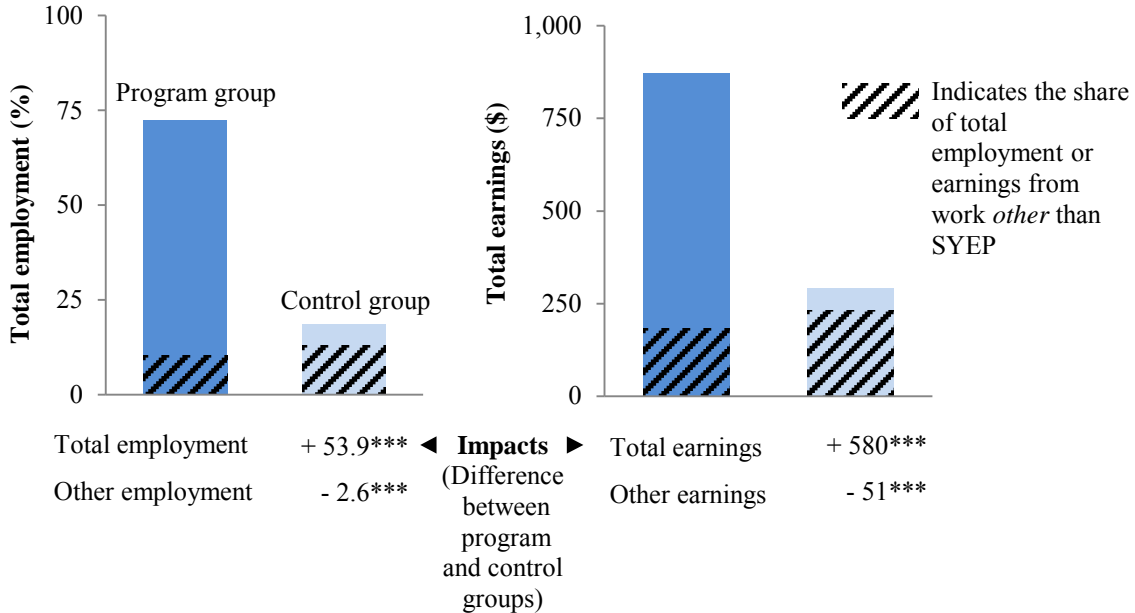
Anna, an 18-year-old from Queens, was a first-time applicant. She heard about SYEP from a teacher at her school, and was looking for a summer job before she started college in the fall. She received a phone call inviting her to participate in SYEP after the program had already started, but the provider asked her to attend a three-hour meeting the next day (presumably for enrollment and orientation), and she was unable to attend because of a prior commitment. Anna did not find another job during the summer and said that she had also searched for work in previous summers. She applied for jobs online and went into stores; she also had interviews with two big retailers. She attributed her challenges in securing a job to her age and her lack of experience. Anna asked her friends and families for advice about her job search but said she mostly navigated the process on her own. She said that her friends had the same challenges as she did but “the summer youth program did help.... For most of them it was their first job.”

Bruce, a 19-year-old from Staten Island, had applied to SYEP in previous years but had not been selected. He was selected by the lottery in 2015 but did not participate because he found a delivery job at a local restaurant that paid more than the minimum wage. This job was his first; he said he had spent most of his summers “hanging out.” He had a good relationship with his supervisor and coworkers but he did not like his job and did not learn any useful skills. He would have liked to receive training to cook but the restaurant did not have any openings. With help from his mother he had filled out a lot of online applications for jobs, but they had not yielded results. He also said that there were not many jobs in his community, and many employers were looking for a college degree. Bruce attended college for one semester but left because of personal challenges that included learning and attention issues.

Sandra, a 21-year-old from Queens, was a student at Hunter College and a first-time SYEP applicant. She learned about SYEP through some friends who had participated before, and applied because she had read on a website that the program would match her to a job based on her interest. She was selected by the lottery and enrolled in SYEP, but decided not to participate when she was placed as an office assistant, work that she had previously done. Instead she chose an unpaid internship with the city’s Department of Parks and Recreation. In her role as a community outreach intern, she visited parks in underserved neighborhoods and surveyed patrons. She thought it was a valuable experience that has made her more confident in pursuing public policy. Before 2015, she had worked part-time in retail and volunteered as an office assistant at a community center and at a local chamber of commerce. Sandra said she received support from friends and family in looking for jobs, and that she also used information from social media and from the career-services office at her college to find work opportunities. She was looking to acquire more skills and experiences in the area of public health and policy and did not plan to apply to SYEP again.

Figure 5.1

Impacts on Employment and Earnings During the Application Summer



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

the right show average total earnings. Within each bar, the share of employment or earnings that is from work other than SYEP is indicated by the diagonal striped lines. For additional information on how to read the impact figures in this report, see Box 5.2. Since the employment data were reported quarterly, the application summer is defined as Quarter 3 (July-September) of the year a young person applied to SYEP. (Young people participated in their SYEP jobs in July and August.) This definition makes it possible to separate SYEP’s impacts while the program was running from its impacts after it ended.

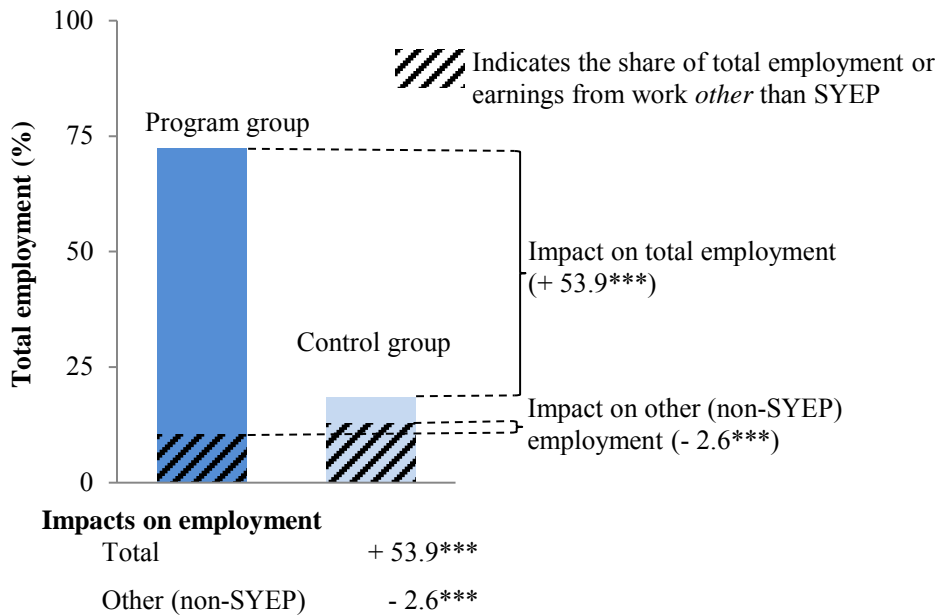
Box 5.2

How to Read the Impact Figures in This Report

Most impact figures in this report use a format like the one illustrated below. In this example, employment outcomes are shown for the program group and the control group. The figure shows that 72.3 percent of the program group and 18.5 percent of the control group were employed during the application summer, with 10.4 percent of program group members and 13.0 percent of control group members employed outside of SYEP.

The difference between the two research groups' total employment rates — that is, the program's estimated impact on employment — is represented by the difference between the heights of the two bars: The estimated impact on total employment during the application summer can be calculated by subtracting 18.5 percent from 72.3 percent, yielding a 53.9 percentage point difference. Similarly, the difference between the two groups' rates of other employment is represented by the difference between the heights of the two striped subsections of the bars — in this case, 13.0 percent is subtracted from 10.4 percent, yielding a -2.6 percentage point difference.

Differences marked with asterisks are “statistically significant,” meaning that it is quite unlikely that the differences arose by chance; that is, they can probably be attributed to the offer to participate in the program. The number of asterisks indicates whether the estimated impact is statistically significant at the 5 percent (one asterisk), 1 percent (two asterisks), or 0.1 percent (three asterisks) level, and the lower the level, the less likely that the impact is a result of chance. For example, SYEP had a statistically significant impact of 53.9 percentage points on total employment during the application summer. This impact is statistically significant at the 0.1 percent level (meaning that there is a 0.1 percent chance that an impact this large could have been observed by chance if the program truly had no impact).



- **SYEP greatly increased total employment and earnings during the application summer by employing young people who would not have worked otherwise.**

As shown in Figure 5.1, the average program group member was 54 percentage points more likely to be employed and earned \$580 more than the average control group member during the application summer — a 290 percent increase in employment and a 200 percent increase in earnings. Since there were negative impacts on non-SYEP employment and earnings (as shown by the differences between the striped sections of the bars in Figure 5.1), these positive impacts on total employment and total earnings were entirely the result of employment and earnings from SYEP itself.

It is important to note that the sizes of the negative impacts on other (non-SYEP) employment and earnings were very small, amounting to just -2.6 percentage points for other employment and -\$51 for other earnings. These small impacts on non-SYEP employment and earnings show that there was very little substitution of SYEP employment for other employment. In other words, SYEP provided employment that, by and large, this population would not have had otherwise.³ These findings indicate that SYEP successfully met its central objectives of introducing young people to the world of work, providing supplemental income to families, and reducing youth unemployment during the summer.

In interviews and focus groups, young people said that the extra income associated with SYEP was important to them. Many said that they applied to SYEP to earn money for use during the school year, to buy back-to-school supplies at the end of the summer, or to save for college. A few providers also talked about participants saving their money for school-related costs. “A lot of them save every dime of their money from the summer,” said one SYEP director at a provider organization. “I have kids who won’t even pick up their debit cards until they go back to school.” A few young people also discussed using the money to help their parents (to buy food, for example) or to buy things that they needed without burdening their parents (clothing, phones, and bicycles, for example). “I didn’t want to ask my parents for a lot of money for starting school and school clothes, so I decided to apply for Summer Youth,” said a 15-year-old SYEP participant.

The results shown in Figure 5.1 are based on all sample members, including some program group members who did not participate in SYEP and some control group members who

³A very large share of all young people (88 percent) — and nearly all young people ages 14 and 15 (98 percent) — did not work in the year before they applied to SYEP, according to the NYSDOL data, suggesting that SYEP was the first work experience for many of them. Interviews with young people and service provider staff members similarly suggested that SYEP is often the first work experience for applicants, particularly younger ones.

did. These results represent the impacts of being *offered* a place in SYEP (based on the primary lotteries), and they are useful for policymakers and practitioners seeking to understand SYEP’s large-scale impacts. In interpreting these impacts, however, it is also helpful to consider the impacts of *participating* in SYEP on the young people who took up the offer of SYEP employment.⁴ To approximate SYEP’s impacts on these young people, one can divide the impact estimates shown in Figure 5.1 by the difference in SYEP participation rates between the program and control groups, in this case 61 percentage points. (As discussed above, 67 percent of program group members participated in SYEP, versus 6 percent of control group members.) *Participating* in SYEP therefore has an impact on total employment during the application summer of about 89 percentage points (54 divided by 0.61) and on earnings of \$951 (\$580 divided by 0.61). In other words, if it were possible to offer SYEP only to young people who would participate in it if they won primary lotteries and who would not participate if they did not win primary lotteries,⁵ the estimated impacts would be nearly twice as large.

Cumulative Participation in SYEP

SYEP allowed young people to reapply in subsequent years as long as they were under the age limit and continued to meet the other eligibility criteria. As a result, young people in the control group could be selected in a later lottery and participate in a later year. (Program group young people could also be selected and participate in later years, whether or not they participated in the year they first applied.) This process has implications for the analysis, which examines the impact of winning the *initial* lottery during the application summer and the five years that follow: the difference between the program group and the control group could become blurred if large numbers of control group members eventually participated in the program. It is therefore important to determine whether program group and control group rates of participation converged over the course of those five years.

- **The program group had considerably higher participation in SYEP than the control group over the entire course of the study period, even though additional control group members did participate in the program in the years after the application summer.**

⁴This participation effect, technically called a “complier average causal effect,” is estimated using a standard application of two-stage least squares instrumental variables analysis. See Angrist, Imbens, and Rubin (1996); Gennetian, Morris, Bos, and Bloom (2005). Such an analysis is often applied in randomized experiments and lottery-based studies. See Abdulkadiroğlu et al. (2011); Bloom and Unterman (2012); Gennetian, Morris, Bos, and Bloom (2005); Ludwig and Kling (2007).

⁵It is not possible to limit the study sample in this way because one cannot know which young people in the control group would have participated if they had won primary lotteries and which young people in the program group would have participated even if they had not won primary lotteries.

Sixty-four percent of program group members and 58 percent of control group members reapplied to SYEP in the years that followed the application summer, but the program group remained significantly more likely than the control group to have participated in SYEP at some point during the study period. Seventy-two percent of the program group participated at least once during the study period (including the application summer), compared with 29 percent of the control group. This difference is reflected in a substantial difference in cumulative weeks participated in these years: The average program group member worked 6.3 weeks in SYEP over the course of the study period, compared with just 2.4 weeks for the average control group member.

Since the program group continued to have considerably higher participation in SYEP over the five years after the application summer, one can have confidence that if SYEP affected young people's outcomes during that time, the analysis in this study (presented below), would be able to detect those impacts.

Impacts in the Five Years After the Application Summer

While SYEP mainly aims to help young people during the summer of the program itself, it also aims to have longer-lasting impacts on young people's employment and education by preparing them for the world of work, providing training, and exposing them to a variety of career paths. This section assesses whether such impacts emerge over the five years that follow the initial summer in the program.⁶

The application summer itself is excluded from this analysis. For the analysis of impacts on employment and earnings and for the analysis of impacts on college enrollment and completion, follow-up years are defined as Quarter 4 of each year through Quarter 3 of the following year (that is, October through September). For example, for a young person who first applied to SYEP in 2008, Follow-Up Year 1 is Quarter 4 of 2008 through Quarter 3 of 2009, or October 2008 through September 2009. For the analysis of impacts on high school attendance and graduation, follow-up years are defined as school years (September-August). Here, for a young person who first applied to SYEP in 2008, Follow-Up Year 1 is September 2008 through August 2009.

⁶Note that "the five years that follow the initial summer" of course vary depending on the year young people initially applied. For example, for young people who applied in 2006, the follow-up period is the years 2006 to 2011; for young people who applied in 2010, it is the years 2010 to 2015. These spans of time overlap with the Great Recession to different extents, and therefore the Great Recession may have affected young people who applied to the program in different years in different ways. For a more in-depth analysis of the Great Recession years, see Chapter 6.

Impacts on Employment and Earnings

Figure 5.2 depicts the program and control groups' employment and earnings over the five years after the application summer. As is the case in Figure 5.1, the difference between the program and control group bars represents SYEP's impact on employment or earnings in that year.

- **SYEP had little impact on employment and earnings over the five years after the application summer.**

SYEP had small but statistically significant positive impacts on total employment in Follow-Up Years 1 and 2 (of 0.9 and 0.5 percentage points, respectively), before the program and control group means converged. These impacts were entirely the result of higher SYEP employment among the program group during the summers of these years. (Program group members were somewhat more likely to reapply to SYEP in later summers than control group members.)⁷ Interestingly, SYEP had small yet statistically significant negative impacts on total earnings during the same years, a result which is consistent with another study of SYEP.⁸ This result may mean that control group members obtained jobs during this time that were more permanent or that paid better.

These impacts do not continue past Year 2, however, and although they are statistically significant, they are probably too small to be meaningful for young people. The large sample size in this study makes it possible to detect statistically significant impacts that are very small, perhaps too small to be relevant to policy. To put these impacts in context, SYEP increased total employment by about 2 percent and reduced total earnings by about 3 percent in Follow-Up Year 1; the changes were even smaller in Follow-Up Year 2.⁹

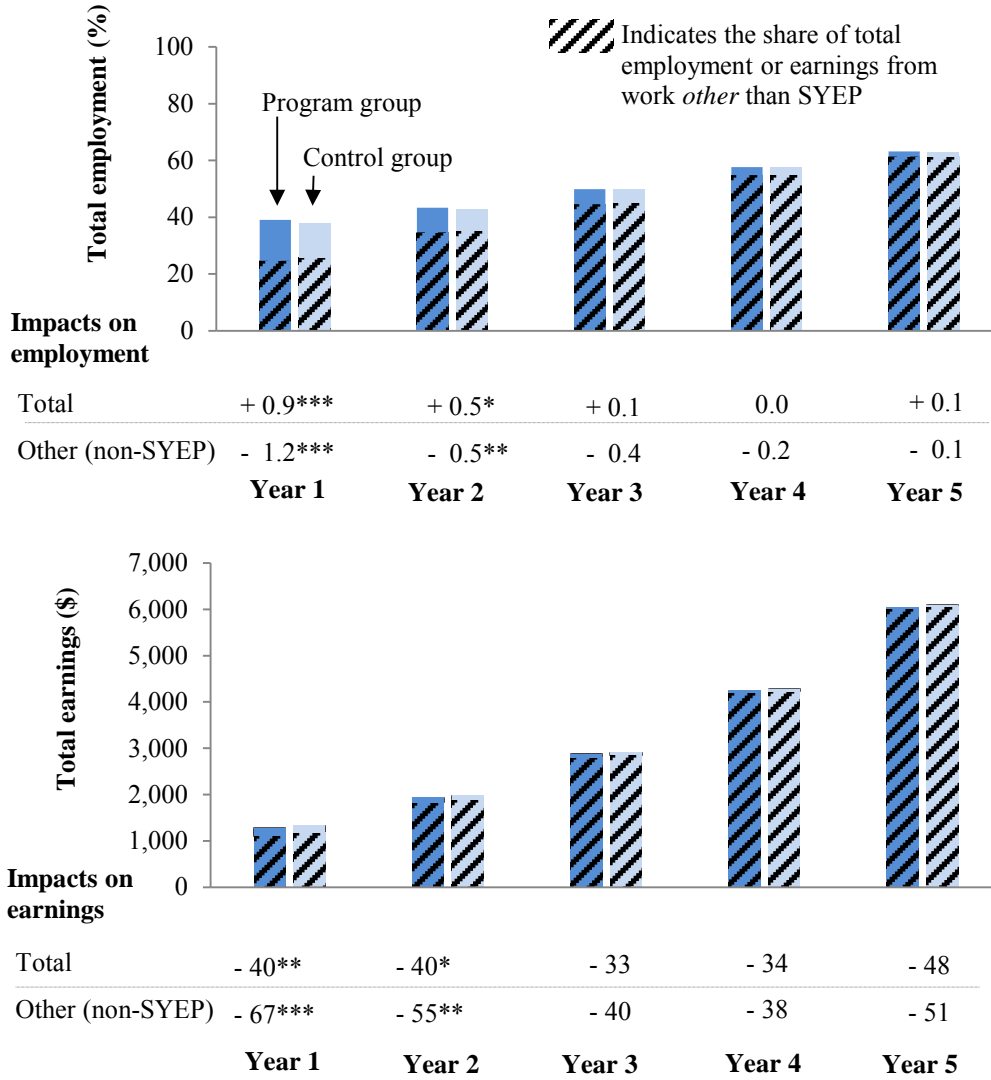
⁷Since total employment, by definition, comprises SYEP employment and other employment, and since the impact on other employment was negative during these years, it follows that the positive impacts on total employment were entirely the result of higher SYEP employment. Higher SYEP employment during the summers may have reduced the program group's need to work during the school year. Program group young people had employment rates during the school-year quarters of Follow-Up Years 1 and 2 that were 0.4 percentage points to 0.9 percentage points lower than those of than control group young people (not shown in Figure 5.2).

⁸Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015).

⁹Another way to understand the size of the impact is by looking at the effect size of the difference between the program and control groups, which is calculated by dividing the estimate of the difference by the standard deviation of the outcome among the control group. While statistical significance may be affected by sample size, the effect size is expressed in uniform units — fractions of the standard deviation — that are independent of sample size and comparable to effect sizes from other studies. The effect sizes for total employment impacts were 0.02 (in Follow-Up Year 1) and 0.01 (in Follow-Up Year 2), and the effect sizes for total earnings impacts were 0.01 (in Follow-Up Year 1) and 0.01 (in Follow-Up Year 2). These effect sizes are considered very small by social science statistical standards. See Cohen (1992).

Figure 5.2

**Impacts on Employment and Earnings
During the Five Years After the Application Summer**



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

Although SYEP did not have any meaningful or lasting impacts on employment or earnings, total employment and earnings rose steadily over time for both groups. During the last year of follow-up shown in Figure 5.2, a little over 60 percent of young people in the study sample were employed and the average young person earned just over \$6,000 a year.¹⁰ This employment rate is similar to — even slightly higher than — the 57 percent of young adults ages 19 to 29 in New York City who said they worked at any time in the past year, when surveyed in the years corresponding to Follow-Up Year 5.¹¹ It is important to note that this citywide survey sample is more evenly distributed in age than the sample in this study, which was disproportionately made up of people from the younger end of that range by Follow-Up Year 5. The citywide measure of employment also included any type of work, whereas the employment measure used in this study only includes formal employment in New York State. These two facts probably mean that the employment gap between New York City young adults and former SYEP applicants is even larger than that captured by these data. Whether or not they were selected by a lottery or ultimately ended up participating in SYEP, applicants to the program may have been more likely to enter the workforce than the general pool of New York City young people.

Impacts on Education

Helping young people reach higher levels in school is one of the most powerful ways to improve their future outcomes. In principle, SYEP could provide such a boost in a variety of ways. For example, participating in a summer work program may instill time-management practices, work habits, and self-confidence that benefit young people when they return to school the following fall. Participating in a structured, constructive program may help address summer learning loss, and the summer income may reduce students' need to work during the school year and allow them to better in engage in school.

Figure 5.3 shows the educational outcomes of the program and control groups over the five years after the application summer: school attendance in Follow-Up Year 1, four-year (on-

¹⁰Young people who were not matched to NYSDOL records in a given quarter were assumed to have \$0 in earnings, which means that these estimated earnings are probably lower than young people's actual earnings. Some of them may have been employed even though they did not appear in the NYSDOL data. For example, if they were employed in another state, were employed informally, or were participating in other summer job programs that were not required to submit wage data to NYSDOL, they would not appear in the NYSDOL records.

¹¹MDRC calculation based on data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey. See Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren (2015).

Figure 5.3

Impacts on Education During the Follow-Up Years

| | Program Group | Control Group | Impact |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| School attendance in Follow-Up Year 1 ^a (%) | 82.8 | 83.0 | - 0.2 |
| 4-year (on-time) high school graduation ^b (%) | 57.1 | 57.2 | - 0.1 |
| College enrollment in Follow-Up Years 1-5 ^c (%) | 56.3 | 56.2 | + 0.1 |
| College degree completion in Follow-Up Years 1-5 ^c (%) | 5.9 | 6.0 | - 0.1 |
| Sample size | 74,686 | 95,297 | |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Education.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

^aYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data at the time they applied to SYEP and in Follow-Up Year 1.

^bYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data, were in eighth grade or higher, and had not graduated from high school when they applied to SYEP.

^cYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data and were in eighth grade or higher at the time they applied to SYEP.

time) high school graduation, college enrollment, and college degree completion.¹² The impacts, or differences between the program and control groups, are shown to the right of the figure. Where those differences are statistically significant, the level of significance is indicated by asterisks next to the impact numbers. The high school graduation measure does not correspond to the follow-up years in the study, but rather indicates whether a young person graduated after

¹²Attendance was measured as the total number of days a student was present during the school year divided by the total number of days that the student was enrolled. Young people with missing attendance rates were assigned values of 0. College enrollment and graduation were measured as enrollment or graduation from two- and four-year colleges across the United States.

four years of high school at any point during the follow-up period.¹³ Young people who were not enrolled in the New York City public school system during the school year immediately preceding the application summer and during relevant years thereafter were excluded from the sample for all education outcome measures.¹⁴

- **SYEP did not affect young people’s school attendance rates, likelihood of graduating from high school, college enrollment, or college degree completion.**

SYEP did not have any statistically significant impact on the number of days that young people attended during the school year immediately following the application summer. The attendance rate during this time was roughly 83 percent among both program and control group members.¹⁵ Additionally, SYEP did not affect young people’s graduation from high school: 57 percent of both groups graduated on time.

Similarly, SYEP did not have any impacts on college enrollment or degree completion. Fifty-six percent of both groups enrolled in college in the five years after the application summer, and about 6 percent of both groups completed a college degree by the end of that follow-up period.

Conclusion

SYEP dramatically increased employment and earnings during the application summer, nearly quadrupling employment and tripling earnings during that time. Given these large impacts during the application summer, it is clear that SYEP met its main objectives of introducing young people to the world of work, providing supplemental income to New York City families, and reducing the youth unemployment rate during the summer. These impacts were short-lived,

¹³Only four years of follow-up data were available for the high school graduation measure, whereas the other educational outcome measures draw on up to five years of follow-up data.

¹⁴This exclusion applied to all lottery strata in the sample. One stratum in particular of about 900 young people was excluded from this analysis due to low enrollment in the New York City public school system. For high school graduation measures, young people who had already graduated from high school or who were below the eighth grade in the year before the application summer were also excluded. For college measures, young people who were below the eighth grade in the year before the application summer were also excluded.

¹⁵This finding is different from that reported by Leos-Urbel (2014), who found a small, significant, positive impact on attendance in the school year following the application summer. It is unclear why the estimates from the two studies differ. A sensitivity analysis was conducted to try to replicate the Leos-Urbel study’s sample and outcome measures using the data from the present study; that analysis also found no significant impacts on attendance. An exact replication of that study is not possible, however, given differences between the two studies in match rates to the data from the New York City public school system, and potentially due to differences in analytic and data-processing decisions.

however, as there was little evidence of any meaningful impacts on employment or educational outcomes in the years that followed. It may be that the program was too brief to have any lasting impact beyond those weeks, or it may be that the types of soft skills and employment connections gained during SYEP could also be learned elsewhere. The implications of these findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Chapter 6 further explores the impacts of SYEP over a longer follow-up period and among subgroups of SYEP applicants.

Chapter 6

Further Exploration of the Summer Youth Employment Program's Impacts

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and the present evaluation are unusual in many ways. The fact that it has been conducting a lottery for so many years makes it possible to do an analysis over a follow-up period of up to nine years, a span that straddles the Great Recession. The program's large size and the number of years of data available also yield a large sample size, which makes it possible to conduct an evaluation of the program's impacts on subgroups of the sample. This section harnesses these interesting features of the program and data to present two additional analyses that supplement the discussion in the previous chapter:

1. **Long-term impacts on employment.** This chapter examines SYEP's impacts over nine years on the young people who first applied to the program in 2006 (the "2006 cohort") and describes patterns in that cohort's employment and earnings.¹ As discussed below, this analysis reveals no pattern of impacts on employment or earnings over these nine years, a result consistent with the results after five years among the full study sample, discussed in Chapter 5.
2. **Impacts on subgroups.** This chapter also assesses whether SYEP had different impacts on young people who were of different ages when they first applied, or on young people who applied in different years. This analysis finds statistically significant subgroup differences in SYEP participation and in impacts on employment and earnings during the application summer (that is, the summer after each sample member's first application to SYEP), with the largest application-summer impacts on people who were younger when they applied and on young people who first applied before the rise in unemployment caused by the Great Recession. There is some evidence to suggest that SYEP had more positive medium-term impacts on employment and earnings among participants who were younger when they first applied and on those who first applied during times of higher unemployment. There were no subgroup differences in impacts on education.

¹As mentioned in Chapter 1, in this report a "cohort" refers to all of the members of the study sample who first applied to the program in a given year.

Long-Term Impacts on Employment

One distinctive characteristic of this evaluation is that there is a large amount of follow-up data available for earlier cohorts. This section follows the 2006 cohort — consisting of 38,235 young people who applied to SYEP for the first time in 2006 — from the application summer through the ninth follow-up year (ending in Quarter 3 of 2015) to assess SYEP’s long-term impacts on employment and earnings and to provide a descriptive account of this group’s employment patterns over time. Figure 6.1 shows total employment and earnings among the program and control groups throughout this period. The follow-up years that correspond with the period of high unemployment associated with the Great Recession — roughly 2009 through 2013 — are indicated by a box.² Statistically significant differences between the program and control groups are indicated below the bars.³

- **SYEP had no meaningful long-term impacts on total employment or earnings among the 2006 cohort, including during the period of high unemployment associated with the Great Recession. This result is consistent with the results after five years among the full study sample.**

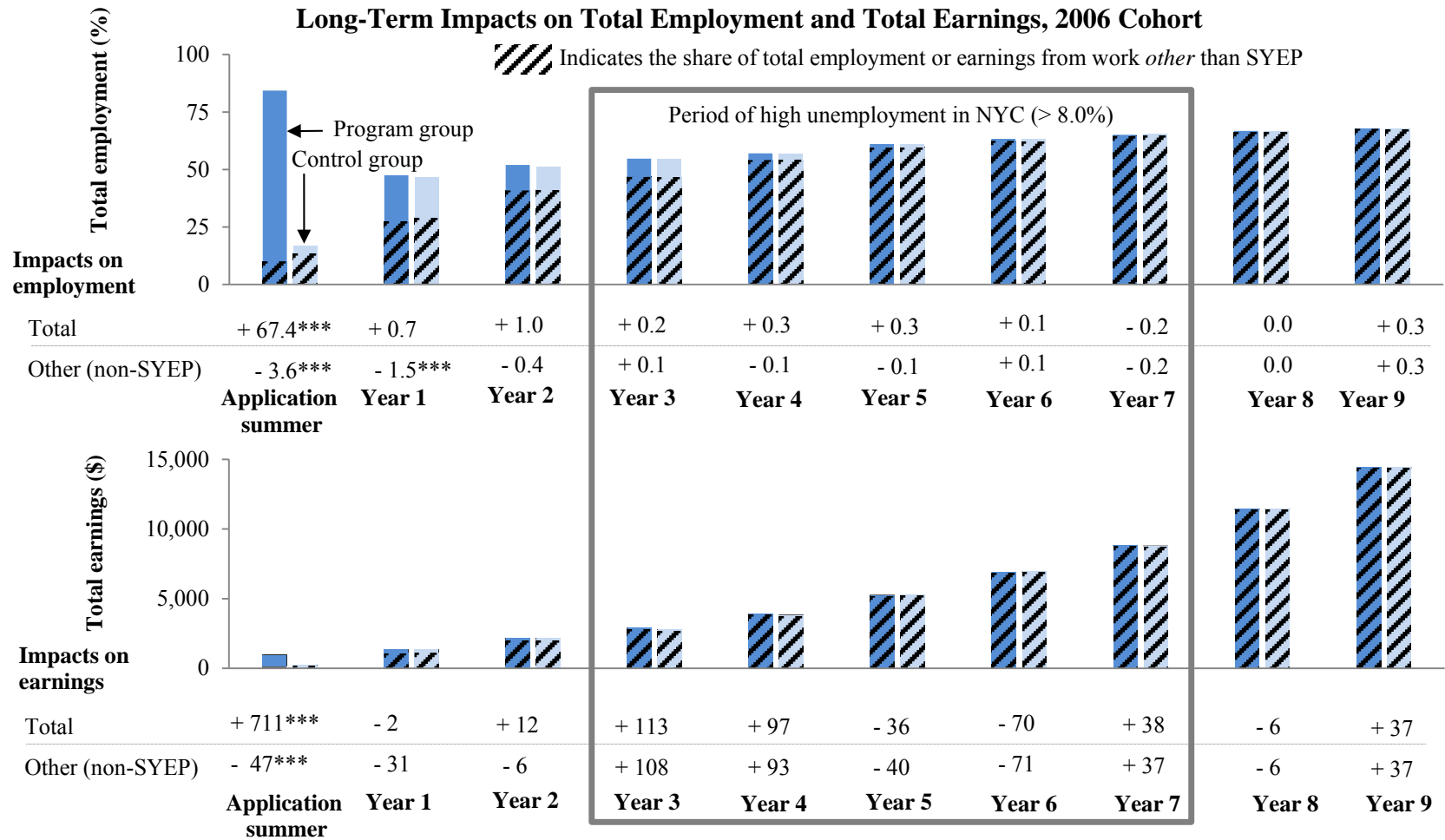
Unsurprisingly, SYEP had a large impact on total employment and earnings during the application summer, the result of higher SYEP employment and earnings among the program group compared with the control group. The groups converged by Follow-Up Year 1 in both employment and earnings, however, and there were no additional statistically significant differences between the groups in subsequent years, including during the period of high unemployment associated with the Great Recession. The fact that this cohort shows such similar results as the full study sample after five years, and that it continues to show no impacts after nine years, together suggest that there is little chance of finding significant long-term impacts among the other cohorts.

The analysis also provides some descriptive information about the employment and earnings of young people in this cohort. Total employment and earnings rose over time for both the program and the control group. Their rate of growth in total employment tapered off as each year found more and more of them already in the workforce, but their total earnings continued to increase steadily, by roughly 3 percent each year, as they took on more permanent or higher-paid work. During the last year shown in Figure 6.1, when these young people were between 23

²The average unemployment rates for the New York-Jersey City-White Plains metropolitan area were as follows: 4.8 percent (the application summer of 2006), 4.5 percent (Year 1), 5.0 percent (Year 2), 8.2 percent (Year 3), 9.4 percent (Year 4), 8.8 percent (Year 5), 9.1 percent (Year 6), 8.5 percent (Year 7), 7.1 percent (Year 8), and 5.7 percent (Year 9). U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

³For additional information on how to read the figures in this report, see Box 5.2.

Figure 6.1



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

and 33 years old, about 68 percent of them were employed in New York State, earning an average of roughly \$14,400. This employment rate is lower than the percentage of New York City young adults ages 23 to 33 who said they worked at any time in 2014 (73 percent), according to data from the 2015 Current Population Survey.⁴ This difference may be due to the fact that the employment database used in the present analysis only includes formal employment that took place in New York State, and therefore misses any employment that was located out of state or that was informal in nature. Because New York City borders New Jersey, it may be common for young people to work out of state. Young people in the study sample may also have been more and more likely to move out of New York State as they grew older and followed education, employment, or other opportunities elsewhere. The latter possibility may at least partly explain why total employment seems to plateau in the later years of Figure 6.1.

Variation in Impacts Among Subgroups

This section exploits the large sample size of this study to explore whether program participation and impacts varied for young people who were of different ages when they applied to SYEP, or for young people who applied in different years. There are a few reasons to hypothesize that results could vary for young people of different ages: Older applicants might have had more employment opportunities outside of SYEP, which could have made them less likely to participate in the program. Young people of different ages may also have had different characteristics, particularly among the first-time applicants included in the sample; people who first apply to SYEP when they are a little older may be a distinctive group. Indeed, compared with younger SYEP applicants, older first-time applicants were more likely to have had work experience in the previous year and were less likely to still be in high school (because they had graduated, had completed a high school equivalency, or had left before graduation). It also appears that older first-time applicants were more likely to be female, more likely to be black, and less likely to have made it to college than New York City young people of similar ages.⁵

It is also possible that SYEP affected young people's outcomes differently depending on the economic conditions that existed when they applied to the program. It could be, for example, that interest in the program increases during periods of high unemployment, leading more young people and young people of different backgrounds to apply to the program. The work experience and earnings that young people gain from SYEP could also be more important to them when other opportunities for employment are scarcer. Indeed, some evidence from

⁴MDRC calculation based on data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey. See Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren (2015).

⁵MDRC calculation based on a comparison of SYEP sample data with data from Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren (2015).

research on temporary jobs programs for adults suggests that the programs have larger short-term impacts when labor markets are weak.⁶ The sample for this study includes cohorts who entered the program both before (2006-2008) and after unemployment rates shot up because of the Great Recession (2009-2010), presenting an opportunity to examine these hypotheses.⁷ For simplicity, these groups of cohorts are referred to as the pre-recession (2006-2008) and recession-era (2009-2010) subgroups in the sections that follow.⁸

Variation in Participation and Impacts Among Subgroups During the Application Summer

Figure 6.2 shows rates of participation in SYEP during the application summer among all subgroups. Program-control group differences within subgroups are indicated by the stars next to the bars, and differences in impacts across subgroups are indicated by the daggers next to the brackets.⁹

- **There were statistically significant differences among subgroups of different ages and subgroups who applied in different years in the proportion of the program group participating in SYEP during the application summer. The application-summer impact on SYEP participation was largest among young teens and the pre-recession subgroup.**

As is the case with the full sample — and not surprisingly — program group members in all subgroups were much more likely to participate in SYEP during the application summer than were control group members. However, while control group participation rates were similar across subgroups,¹⁰ program group participation rates were not. Participation rates were highest among the youngest program group members: 73 percent of young teen (age 14-15), 63 percent of teen (age 16-17), and 55 percent of young adult (age 18-24) program group members participated in SYEP during the application summer.

⁶Redcross et al. (2010).

⁷The New York City unemployment rate increased dramatically in late 2008 due to the Great Recession and remained above 8 percent through much of 2013. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

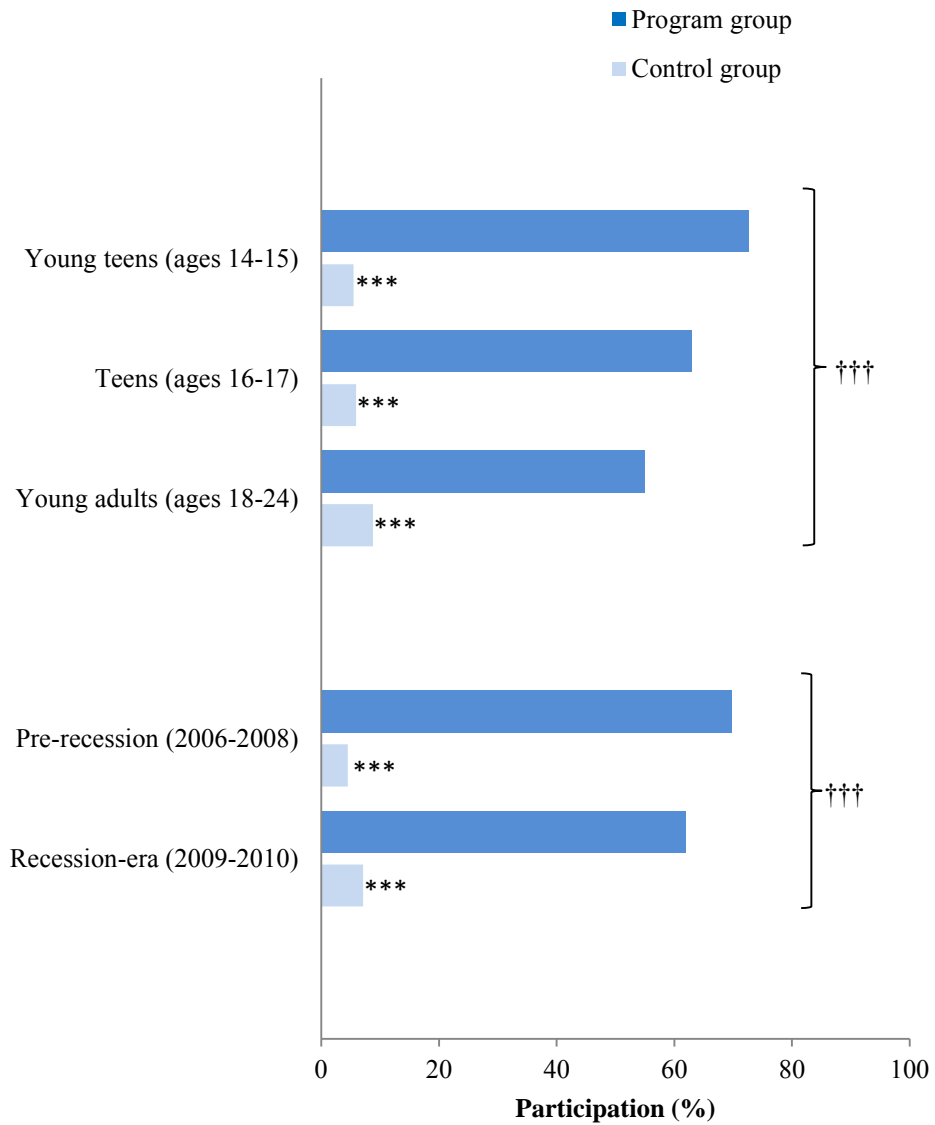
⁸A programmatic change in 2009 extended the maximum eligible age from 21 to 24 years old. To make the subgroups more comparable, this subgroup analysis was limited to those who were ages 14 to 21 during the application summer.

⁹For additional information on how to read the figures in this report, see Box 5.2.

¹⁰See Chapter 5 for information about why some control group members participated despite not being selected in a primary random lottery.

Figure 6.2

SYEP Participation During the Application Summer, by Subgroups



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent. Statistical significance levels of subgroup differences in impacts are indicated next to the bars as follows: ††† = 0.1 percent; †† = 1 percent; † = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

The variation in participation rates by age may reflect differences in opportunities for other summer work. Younger applicants may have been more likely to participate if selected because they had few other options. Indeed, DYCD administrators and providers reported that many employers are reluctant to hire young people in their early teens. Nearly all of the 14- and 15-year-olds interviewed in 2015 — including those who did not win places in SYEP — said that they did not look for other work opportunities outside of the program. A couple of young people who tried to find other work were not successful. SYEP “was basically the only opportunity I had, being a 15-year-old,” said one participant. Many of the young teens also said that they applied to SYEP at the urging of their parents (“Mom did not want me to sit at home” was a common reason), and higher participation rates among young teens may generally reflect greater parental participation and influence. Younger teens might engage more “because parents do the application and push them out the door,” said an SYEP director at a provider organization. Finally, if the older group of applicants was more disadvantaged or disconnected (which may be the case, given their distinctive characteristics discussed above), they may have also been more difficult to reach or had other barriers that prevented them from participating. Box 6.1 describes some of the experiences of young people who applied to SYEP in 2015 but did not participate; these experiences illustrate how opportunities for summer work can change as young people age.

Program group members’ rates of participation in SYEP also differed depending on the year they applied: a larger share of program group members participated in the pre-recession subgroup (70 percent) than the recession-era subgroup (62 percent). This finding is unexpected because one might think that times when there are fewer employment opportunities (periods of high unemployment) would see increased interest and participation in SYEP. Indeed, there was a small increase in applications to SYEP in 2009. It is unclear why participation decreased in these years, though if SYEP attracted young people during these years of higher unemployment who would not have applied otherwise, the average level of interest among applicants may have been lower than it had been before.

- **SYEP increased total employment and earnings among all subgroups during the application summer, with the largest impacts on young teens and the pre-recession subgroup.**

While the program’s positive impacts on SYEP employment grow progressively smaller going from the youngest age group to the oldest age group (echoing the differences in SYEP participation by age noted previously), its negative impacts on non-SYEP employment become larger, as shown in Figure 6.3. The result is that the positive impacts on *total* employment during the application summer become progressively smaller going from the youngest to the oldest age group, and those impacts shrink even more than the impacts on SYEP employment

Box 6.1

Alternatives to SYEP: Snapshots from 2015

Between September and November of 2015, MDRC conducted telephone interviews with 30 young people who applied to SYEP in 2015 but did not participate in the program. MDRC aimed to select young people for the interviews who were of various ages, who were of both genders, who had applied to various service providers, and who had worked in different types of jobs. This deliberately chosen sample does not necessarily represent the entire SYEP applicant pool the way a random sample might, and as a result the findings from these interviews may not represent the experiences of all SYEP applicants. The experiences of a few of the interviewees, whose real names are not used, are shared here.

David, a 15-year-old from the Bronx, was a first-time applicant. He learned about SYEP from a provider who recruited in his school. He did not apply to other jobs for the summer. When he did not hear from SYEP, David went to Senegal to visit his extended family and spent most of his summer there. When he went back to school, David started working in an after-school program where he helped the staff distribute snacks to children — an experience that taught him to be patient and organized, he said. He planned to apply to SYEP again, and potentially to other jobs, but he was not thinking a great deal about his future job searches. He said he wished there were more internship opportunities available for young people to get different kinds of work experience.

John, a 15-year-old from Queens, was a first-time applicant. He learned about SYEP from a guidance counselor in his high school. He had not worked before. He applied to SYEP because he was looking to keep busy and earn some money; he also applied to work with children in an after-school program in his school. He did not get the SYEP job but did end up spending his summer at the after-school program, which offered a combination of academic services, field trips, and other recreational activities. He said he aspired to be a doctor or an engineer, and that he went to his parents and guidance counselor with questions about school and future plans. John said that it was difficult to find a part-time job during the school year that could accommodate his school schedule.

Tara, a 16-year-old from Brooklyn, had applied to SYEP twice but had not been selected to participate. She heard about SYEP at the boarding school she attended in Brooklyn, which she said required students to participate in work-related programs. The school helped Tara get a summer internship in 2015 in the insurance industry. In this program Tara and her peers visited large insurance companies, met with staff members from different departments to talk about their roles, and participated in discussions and writing exercises to reflect on what they learned. They also engaged in work-readiness activities, during which she learned how to dress professionally, among other things. Tara found her internship experience valuable because it taught her about career options in these industries. She was also able to build a professional network. She planned to apply to SYEP again.

Lenny, an 18-year-old from Queens, applied to SYEP for the second time in 2015; he had applied in a previous year but was not selected. He heard about SYEP through friends who were former SYEP participants and had had positive experiences in the program. Lenny

finished high school in 2015 and was studying business at a community college. He had never had a job, as he traveled most summers in high school; he traveled to his native country, Trinidad, for a part of the summer in 2015. Besides SYEP, he applied to other jobs for the summer, mostly in retail, but was not successful in getting one. He continued to look for retail jobs but was willing to work anywhere. He looked for work online, and in person by going door to door. Lack of work experience was the biggest barrier to getting a job, he said. Most of his friends who did not get selected by SYEP also ended up doing nothing over the summer; those who were selected worked at day camps.

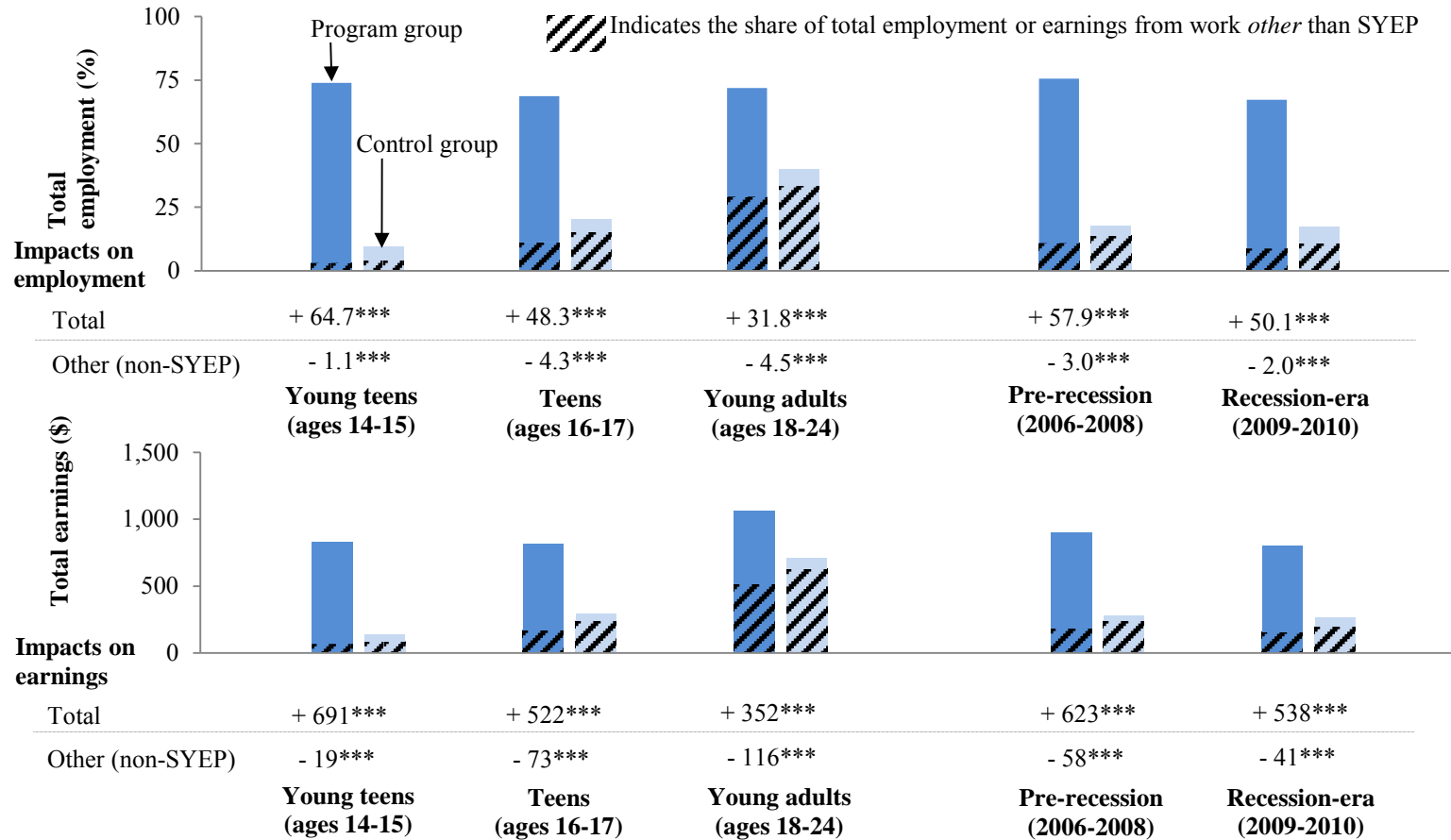
Andrew, a 21-year-old from Brooklyn, was a first-time applicant but had known of SYEP for a long time. When he was younger, for three years he worked at a summer camp that was also an SYEP work site. When he applied to SYEP, he had been looking for work for about a year. He said that he was not interested in retail jobs, which were abundant, and also found that many other jobs required a college degree, which he did not have (he did have a high school equivalency and planned to go to college in the future). He had found a job earlier in the summer with an electricity and gas provider to conduct door-to-door sales, but he left because the “hours were insane for so little pay.” He then became a driver for Uber, and was happy with the job because he got to set his own schedule and made enough to save some money. Andrew did not plan to apply to SYEP in 2016.

Anthony, a 23-year-old from Queens, first participated in SYEP in 2009. He applied for the second time in 2015 because he had recently finished a postbaccalaureate certificate program in Paralegal Studies and was looking for work. Using Craigslist, he was able to get a paid summer job outside of SYEP as a paralegal at a law firm. He described his summer experience as a very positive one where he had the opportunity to learn a lot of skills, including writing legal briefs, and where he received guidance from his supervising attorney. He was looking for full-time, permanent work and was using his supervisor as a reference for jobs. In 2009, he was placed in a clothing store through SYEP, where he learned work ethic, how to conduct himself in a work environment, and how to handle stress. But he did not like the fact that the work was not “geared towards building [him] to be a better employee or for any kind of growth at all.” He did not apply to SYEP again until 2015 because he was able to find jobs on his own; in fact, he felt that his SYEP job led to “a pattern of retail jobs” because that was the only experience he had: “I got typecast into retail until I finished college.” He thought young people could use help in creating “a good job network,” which included getting “more employers who are willing to work and train students in jobs that can lead them to careers in which they want to work.”

alone: 65 percentage point, 48 percentage point, and 32 percentage point differences among young teens, teenagers, and young adults, respectively. The differences in impacts on other employment also show that young people were less likely to substitute SYEP for other employment as they got older. Impacts on total earnings follow the same pattern.

Figure 6.3

Impacts on Employment and Earnings During the Application Summer, by Subgroups



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

Differences in the sizes of impacts among subgroups are all statistically significant at the 0.1 percent level.

Additionally, the estimated impacts on total employment and earnings during the application summer were larger for the pre-recession subgroup than for the recession-era subgroup. These subgroup differences were almost entirely the result of the pre-recession subgroup's greater SYEP participation, which led directly to the program's larger impact on their SYEP employment and earnings. (The differences between the subgroups in impacts on non-SYEP employment and earnings, while statistically significant, were much smaller than the differences found among the age subgroups, indicating that there were much smaller differences between cohort subgroups in the degree to which SYEP was substituted for other employment than there were among the age groups.)

Overall, while SYEP did have different impacts on application-summer employment and earnings for different subgroups, the program succeeded in increasing employment and earnings among all subgroups.

Subgroup Impacts During the Five Years After the Program

Figures 6.4 through 6.7 show SYEP's impacts over five years on employment and education for each set of subgroups, with differences between subgroups indicated by daggers beneath the measures.

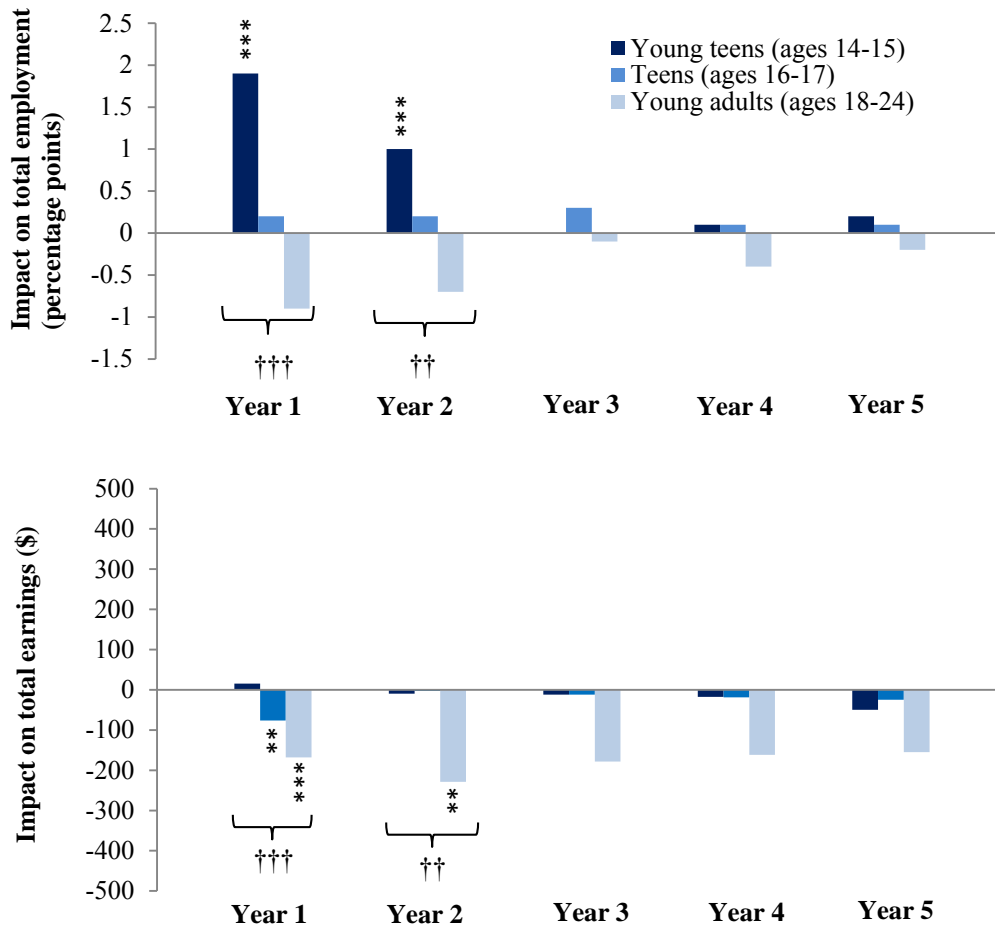
- **Small, negative impacts on earnings in Follow-Up Years 1 and 2 were concentrated among young adults and members of the pre-recession subgroup, suggesting that the program has more positive impacts on younger applicants and during times of higher unemployment. However, these impacts were still probably too small to have made any meaningful difference in young people's lives.**

While SYEP had statistically significant positive impacts on total employment among the youngest age group in Follow-Up Years 1 and 2, it did not have any impacts on total employment for the two older subgroups (teens and young adults) during the follow-up years, as shown in Figure 6.4. Notably, SYEP had statistically significant negative impacts on total earnings of \$168 and \$229 in Follow-Up Years 1 and 2, respectively, among those who were young adults when they first applied to the program. In contrast, there were no significant impacts on total earnings among those who were young teens when they first applied. This finding indicates that the small, negative impacts on total earnings seen among the full sample (see Chapter 5) were concentrated among older participants.

These differences may have arisen because older applicants had more employment options (which made it easier for the control group members to find employment elsewhere, and perhaps employment that was higher paid or more permanent) than younger ones (for whom

Figure 6.4

Impacts on Total Employment and Total Earnings, by Age



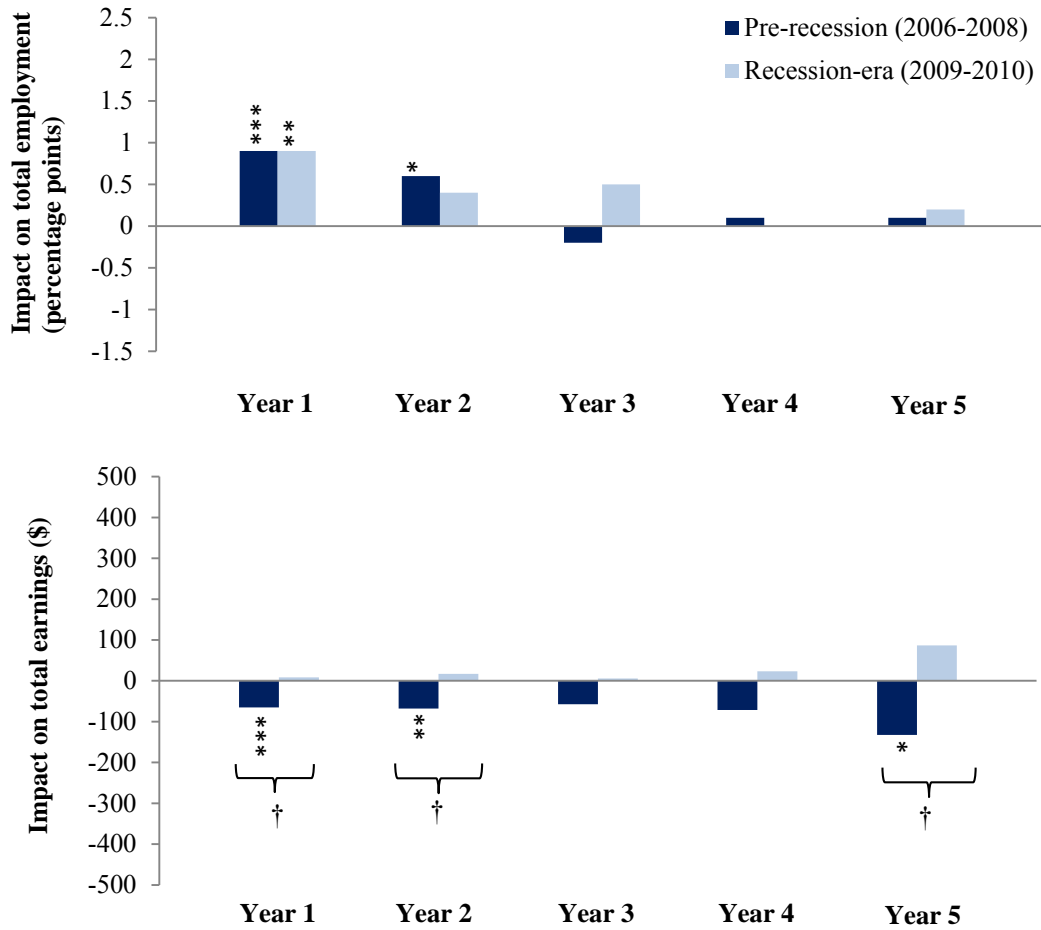
SOURCE: MDRC calculations using quarterly wage data from the New York State Department of Labor.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels of program and control group differences are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent. Statistical significance levels of subgroup differences in impacts are indicated as follows: ††† = 0.1 percent; †† = 1 percent; † = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

Figure 6.5

Impacts on Total Employment and Total Earnings, by Cohort Subgroup

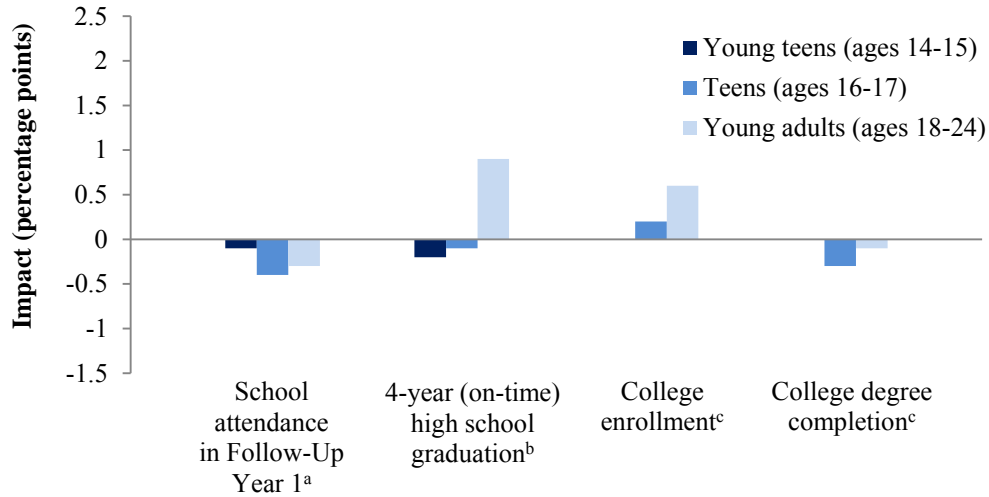


SOURCE: MDRC calculations using quarterly wage data from the New York State Department of Labor.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels of program and control group differences are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent. Statistical significance levels of subgroup differences in impacts are indicated as follows: ††† = 0.1 percent; †† = 1 percent; † = 5 percent.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

Figure 6.6
Impacts on Education, by Age



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Education.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels of program and control group differences are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent. None of the subgroup differences in impacts are significantly different.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

^aYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data at the time they applied to SYEP and in Follow-Up Year 1.

^bYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data, were in eighth grade or higher, and had not graduated from high school when they applied to SYEP.

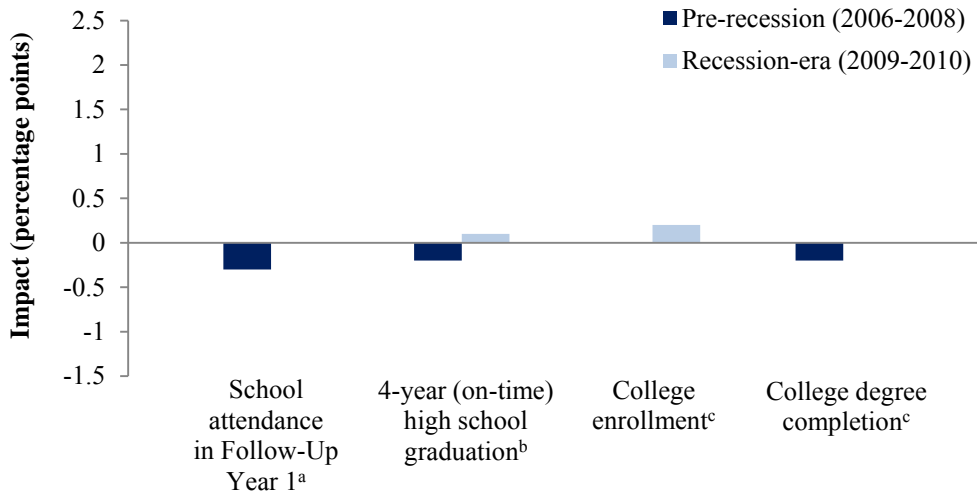
^cYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data and were in eighth grade or higher at the time they applied to SYEP.

SYEP was often the only employment option). However, even among members of the oldest subgroup, these impacts are probably too small to have made a meaningful difference in their lives. The changes in total employment and earnings mentioned above are only 5 percent to 7 percent different from the control group averages.

While SYEP did not have different impacts on the total employment rates of the pre-recession and recession-era subgroups in the years following the application summer, it did have slightly different impacts on the total earnings of the two subgroups in Follow-Up Years 1, 2, and 5, as shown in Figure 6.5. SYEP appears to have had a smaller negative impact on total earnings among young people who applied for the first time during the Great Recession than it

Figure 6.7

Impacts on Education, by Cohort Subgroup



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the New York City Department of Education.

NOTES: Statistical significance levels in program and control group differences are indicated as follows: *** = 0.1 percent; ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent. None of the subgroup differences in impacts are significantly different.

Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

^aYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data at the time they applied to SYEP and in Follow-Up Year 1.

^bYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data, were in eighth grade or higher, and had not graduated from high school when they applied to SYEP.

^cYoung people are only included if they were matched to Department of Education data and were in eighth grade or higher at the time they applied to SYEP.

had among young people who applied for the first time in a better labor market. This difference could be because there were fewer employment alternatives available during the recession, meaning that control group members were less likely to get other jobs during this time. However, the negative impacts on total earnings among the pre-recession subgroup are tiny, representing a 5 percent change at most in total earnings. Therefore, even these negative impacts were probably too small to have had any meaningful impact on young people's lives.

On average, SYEP did not affect young people's school attendance, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, or college degree completion, and there was no variation in this lack of impacts across subgroups of students of different ages or cohorts. Figure 6.6 illustrates

that there were no statistically significant differences in SYEP's impacts on school attendance in Follow-Up Year 1, nor in the program's impacts on on-time high school graduation, college enrollment, or college degree completion. Similarly, Figure 6.7 shows that neither the pre-recession nor the recession-era subgroup experienced any impacts on education outcomes.

Figure 6.8 traces the path of an average program group member who was age 14 at the time of application to SYEP in 2006, from the application summer through early adulthood nine years later. The average 14-year-old applicant is depicted since that person's follow-up period covers high school, college education, and young adulthood. Although there are few impacts to note, this box weaves together employment and education findings to show a more complete picture of the trajectory of the average 14-year-old offered a place in SYEP.

Conclusion

This chapter builds on Chapter 5 to offer two deeper looks into SYEP's impacts on employment, earnings, and educational outcomes. While SYEP had a large impact on total employment and earnings during the application summer for the 2006 cohort — as was also the case for the full sample (see Chapter 5) — there was no long-term pattern of impacts on employment or earnings over nine years of follow-up.

The subgroup analyses revealed that there were statistically significant subgroup differences in participation in SYEP during the application summer, and in SYEP's impacts on total employment and earnings during that period. SYEP participation rates were highest and its impacts on total employment and earnings during the application summer were greatest among young teens and among those who applied during the period of high unemployment associated with the Great Recession. In the five years that followed the application summer, SYEP had larger impacts on the employment and earnings of young teens and young people who applied during the Great Recession, though these impacts are still probably too small to have made any real difference in young people's lives. The implications of these findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Figure 6.8

Employment and Education Outcomes for 14-Year-Old Program Group Members Over Time, 2006 Cohort

During the application year

SYEP dramatically increased total employment and earnings for the program group. Only 8 percent of the control group was employed, earning \$89 on average.

During the follow-up period

Total employment and earnings continued to rise for both the program and control groups as these young people passed through high school and early adulthood. By the time they were 23 years old, over two-thirds of both groups were employed in New York State and the average program group member earned \$11,771 per year (\$16,929 among those who were employed).

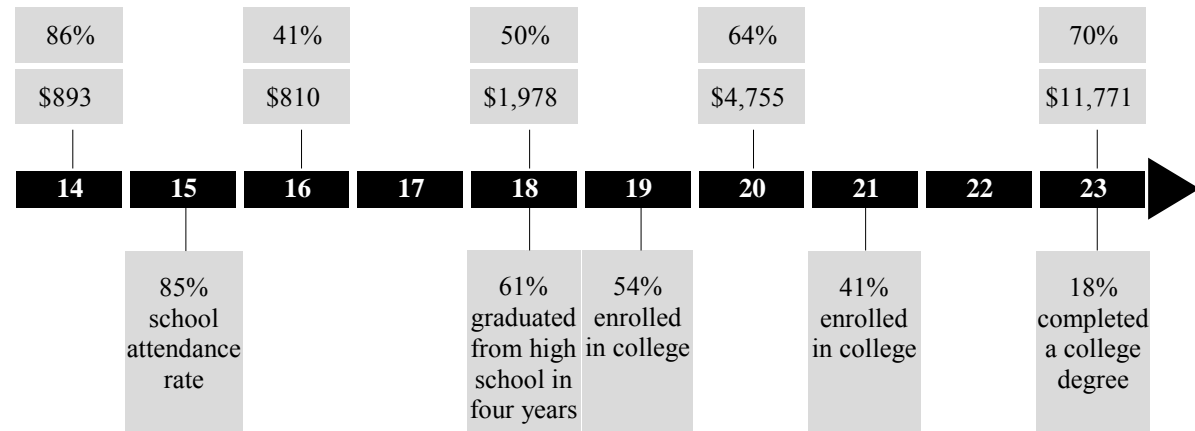
SYEP participation rate 85%

Total employment rate

Total earnings

Age

Education outcomes



There were no effects on young people’s school attendance, probability of graduating from high school, college enrollment, or college completion. The average attendance rate during what was the first year of high school for most young people was 85 percent, and 61 percent graduated on time from high school. More than half enrolled in college soon after graduating from high school, with nearly 1 in 5 completing a college degree by age 23.

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the New York State Department of Labor, the New York City Department of Education, and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

NOTE: Results in this figure are regression-adjusted for baseline characteristics and lottery strata.

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Chapter 7

Discussion of Findings and Policy Implications

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) plays a role in the lives of tens of thousands of young people and in the overall economy in New York City. It dwarfs many other programs serving young people in the United States; in recent years, has placed more than 40,000 young people in jobs each summer. Each year overall, the program puts tens of millions of dollars, in total, into the pockets of young people, most of whom are from low-income families.¹ This report provides new insights into the challenges and strategies involved in implementing SYEP, the experiences of young people who participate in the program, and the program's impacts on their education and employment.

The results show that SYEP is successful in providing work experience and supplemental income during the summer to a substantial number of young people who would not otherwise be working. About 72 percent of program group members worked during the application summer, a rate that is nearly four times that of control group members (19 percent) and that far exceeds employment rates for young people in general in a time of historically low teenage labor-force participation. This impact on summer employment meant that program group members earned \$580 more, on average, than control group members over the summer. This is a substantial amount of money, and in interviews and focus groups, young people confirmed that the earnings from SYEP were important to them. For example, young people said that they used the SYEP earnings to buy school supplies, saved the money for use during the school year, saved for college, and used it to help their parents (by buying food, for instance).

Despite SYEP's large impacts on employment and earnings during the application summer, the program appears to have little meaningful impact on medium- and long-term labor-market and education outcomes. These findings agree with those of previous studies that have also found that summer jobs programs are effective in engaging young people in short-term work, but that they struggle to increase employment and earnings or educational attainment beyond the summer.²

Other studies on youth employment programs suggest that to improve the longer-term outcomes of SYEP participants, it would be necessary to incorporate additional, more labor-intensive and expensive program components. For instance, programs that incorporate career-

¹Between 2006 and 2014, the total amount paid to young people who participated in SYEP ranged from about \$25 million to about \$45 million per year.

²Gelber, Isen, and Kessler (2015); Heller (2014); Leos-Urbel (2014); McClanahan, Sipe, and Smith (2004).

specific skills training and work experience with intensive support services to address personal barriers to success and to foster young people's development have been relatively successful in improving young people's employment outcomes after they leave the programs.³ Because SYEP's eligibility criteria are broad and the program serves such a diverse group of young people, such services would be likely to work best if they were tailored to participants based on their ages, school statuses, or other factors.

However, the implementation findings from this evaluation suggest that it would be very difficult to provide services like these at a scale as large as the SYEP program. Providers place tens of thousands of young people into summer jobs in a very short time, often with little warning about how many placements they will need to make. This process requires extraordinary effort and efficiency, and it is difficult to imagine how more intensive or individually tailored services could be incorporated at current levels of funding and administrative staffing while the program continues to serve such large numbers of young people.

The implementation analysis also suggests that until 2015, fluctuations in funding levels from year to year made the planning process difficult. In 2016, the city committed to a baseline budget to serve at least 60,000 young people each summer, which may mean that in the future SYEP providers will be able to make some potentially beneficial changes. For example, they might be able to place more participants with employers that have lengthier hiring processes (hospitals, for example), notify more young people earlier about their acceptance into the program, and plan in advance the staffing and community partnerships it would take for them to strengthen their educational services.

In addition, in recent years the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has made efforts to customize SYEP's services for different age groups. Young people under 16 receive more intensive education in work readiness, career exploration, and other life skills. The program also offers some specialized placements. Some work sites are tailored to young people with disabilities; participants who are doing relatively well academically can apply for "Ladders for Leaders" professional internships; and some "vulnerable youth" who are involved with the child welfare, juvenile justice, or runaway and homeless youth systems receive additional case management and referral services.⁴ However, these specialized options serve a very small share of all SYEP participants for logistical and cost-related reasons. Still, the city continues to work toward improving the program, and in the summer of 2017, DYCD will conduct a few small-scale pilot tests of new program models targeting young people with varying service needs.

³Hossain and Bloom (2015).

⁴Both Ladders for Leaders participants and vulnerable youth participants bypassed the random admission lotteries and are excluded from the study sample.

Overall, the implementation and impact findings presented in this report highlight the tension between SYEP's short-term and long-term goals. It is difficult to provide jobs and income to a large number of young people in a short time *and* to provide services that are individually tailored and intensive enough that they could affect young people's lives in the long term. When making implementation decisions about summer youth employment programs, funders and practitioners may need to think carefully about a program's central objectives and weigh the costs and benefits of focusing on short- versus long-term goals.

Finally, when assessing the program it is also important to look beyond its impacts on individual participants and to consider the value of the work that SYEP contributes to the city and its residents. For example, SYEP partly bears the cost of labor for hundreds of camps and day care programs, many of which serve low-income families seeking child care and enrichment options for their children during the summer. Without SYEP, these programs could become too expensive for low-income families. In addition, many SYEP placements involve community service projects that can benefit New York City communities in ways that are difficult to quantify. For example, young people at one work site led a project to build a digital catalog for a public school library and helped immigrant and low-income families to access their children's digital school records. In sum, the goals and potential benefits of SYEP and other summer youth employment programs are varied and may extend beyond their impacts on individuals.

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Appendix A

**Characteristics of the Study Sample and All Summer
Youth Employment Program Applicants**

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Appendix Table A.1

**Baseline Characteristics of the Study Sample (First-Time Applicants)
and All Applicants (Including Repeat Applicants), 2006-2010**

| Characteristic (%) | Study Sample | All Applicants |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Age | | |
| 14-15 | 52.3 | 36.9 |
| 16-17 | 28.5 | 37.5 |
| 18-24 | 19.2 | 25.6 |
| Male | 45.9 | 45.1 |
| Race | | |
| Hispanic | 30.5 | 27.4 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 43.3 | 46.1 |
| White, non-Hispanic | 12.1 | 13.5 |
| Asian | 8.4 | 8.0 |
| Other | 5.6 | 5.0 |
| Borough | | |
| Bronx | 25.1 | 24.3 |
| Brooklyn | 37.7 | 40.0 |
| Manhattan | 13.2 | 13.1 |
| Queens | 19.2 | 18.0 |
| Staten Island | 4.8 | 4.7 |
| Educational status | | |
| High school or below | 86.1 | 82.4 |
| Left high school before graduating | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| High school graduate, not attending school | 3.1 | 4.4 |
| High school equivalency recipient, not attending school | 1.9 | 2.0 |
| College student | 6.9 | 9.2 |
| Sample size | 264,075 | 509,977 |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development.

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