

Fall 2018

LEO QUARTERLY REPORT



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LEO NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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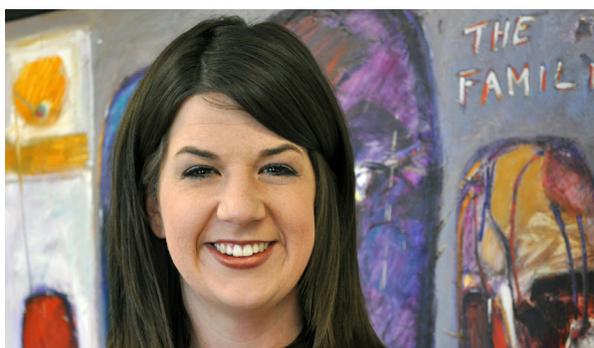


FEATURED ON NPR

LEO Associate Research Professor David Phillips has been featured by two NPR affiliates for his work on homelessness and employment. He spoke with Kate Walters in Seattle about LEO's research findings on effective homelessness prevention and the ongoing evaluation of the Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative in King County, WA. He also spoke with Kojo Nnamdi, based in Washington, D.C., about his research showing that employers hiring for low-wage jobs in downtown D.C. are more likely to call back applicants who live nearby, excluding the commuting demographic.

NEW LEADERSHIP

Heather Reynolds has been named the inaugural Managing Director of LEO. Heather is currently President and CEO of Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW), one of LEO's key provider partners in the effort to create evidence-based programs and policies that reduce poverty and improve lives. During her 14 years at CCFW, Heather grew the organization into one of the largest Catholic Charities in the country and pioneered its approach to rigorous program evaluation. Heather will join LEO in January 2019.



Heather Reynolds, inaugural Managing Director of LEO.



The 2018 summer undergraduate interns.

WE'RE GROWING

Joining us over the past six months at LEO are Becca Brough, Research Associate; Grace Ortuzar, Senior Research Associate; Patrick Turner, Assistant Research Professor; and Aubrey McDonough, Research Associate. In addition, we employed 13 undergraduate Research Assistants and one Marketing and Communications intern at LEO this summer.

PROMOTION

LEO co-founder Jim Sullivan was recently named Full Professor of Economics and Gilbert F. Schaefer College Chair at the University of Notre Dame.

A NEW WAY TO MEASURE POVERTY

LEO co-founder Jim Sullivan and Bruce Meyer, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, have developed a consumption-based poverty measure to more accurately determine poverty rates across the United States. In a Wall Street Journal Op-Ed, they argue that the national poverty level has "declined significantly over the past 50 years." More information on their measurement tool can be found at povertymeasurement.org.

FACULTY AFFILIATE UPDATES

LEO's research network is comprised of faculty affiliates from universities around the country with experience evaluating anti-poverty programs. LEO identifies innovative projects and matches them to academic researchers with appropriate expertise.

SEAN CORCORAN

Professor Corcoran joined Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development as an Associate Professor of Public Policy and Education in August 2018. Prior to that, Professor Corcoran spent 13 years at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

THOMAS DEE

Professor Dee was appointed to an endowed chair, as the new Barnett Family Professor of Education at Stanford University's School of Education.

MATTHEW FREEDMAN

Professor Freedman's paper, "Why Has Urban Inequality Increased?", was published in the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* in October 2018. The paper examines the mechanisms underlying the more rapid increases in wage inequality in larger cities in recent decades.

CHLOE GIBBS

Professor Gibbs received a National Science Foundation grant from the economics program for her project, "Parenting, Preschool, and the Production of School Readiness and Later Academic Outcomes."

CRAIG GUNDERSEN

Professor Gunderson testified in front of the House Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Governmental Affairs and Subcommittee on Healthcare, Benefits, and Administrative Rules. Professor Gunderson highlighted ways the SNAP program can be improved to ensure those who need it most, benefit from it.

ETHAN LIEBER

Professor Lieber's paper with co-author Lee M. Lockwood, "Targeting with In-Kind Transfers: Evidence from Medicaid Home Care" was accepted for publication in the *American Economic Review*.

RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

Partner Agency:
Catholic Social Services
Rapid City

Policy Focus Area:
Education

Investigators:
Sarah Kroeger
William Evans

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Uplifting Parents Program (Program UP) is a mentoring program that empowers and supports single parents as they seek to improve their education or obtain job training. Program UP provides a mentor, intensive case management, and a modest monthly stipend to support single parents as they advance their education and work toward the goals of achieving financial self-sufficiency and providing greater opportunities for their children. Mentors work with each client to help them solve logistical problems, such as finding childcare, securing transportation to class, and scheduling work and school.

SIGNIFICANCE

There are 8.5 million single mothers in the U.S. under the age of 40. Many single mothers lack the educational background to successfully compete in the job market, but, due to the demands of parenthood, are unable to complete a college degree. However, community college degrees are a relatively low-cost way for single parents to reduce their chance of being in poverty. Single mothers with an associate's degree earn 24% more than single mothers with a high school degree only. Additionally, both unemployment and poverty rates for those with an associate's degree are roughly half the rates for those with a high school education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The evaluation will explore the impact of Program UP on educational, employment, and benefit usage outcomes for participants and their children. Specifically, LEO seeks to answer the following questions: What is the impact of Program UP on college graduation rates for single parents? What is the impact of the program on test scores for the children of participating

parents? Does Program UP affect earnings and employment for participants? Does the program affect parents' usage of public benefit programs, such as SNAP and TANF?

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

LEO is assessing the impact of Program UP through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) study design. To enroll in the study, individuals must be parenting or expecting and must not be struggling with addiction or substance abuse. Individuals must also successfully complete an application interview with a staff member of Catholic Social Services Rapid City (CSS Rapid City). Eligible participants are randomized into either the treatment group or the control group. The treatment group is offered a spot in Program UP, while the control group is referred to alternative resources in the community. Using administrative data to measure outcomes, LEO will quantify the impact of Program UP by comparing differences in average outcomes between the treatment and control groups.

PROJECT STATUS

The evaluation will last three years and include 240 participants - 120 receiving Program UP services and 120 in the comparison group. Each year, 40 individuals will enroll in Program UP through three distinct enrollment periods. LEO and CSS Rapid City have enrolled two cohorts of participants and will complete the first year of enrollment with a third cohort of participants in February 2019. A data sharing agreement has been established with CSS Rapid City and an agreement is in progress with the local school district. LEO will also seek data from the National Student Clearinghouse and the South Dakota Department of Labor.



Natalie Lecy (CSW-PIP, QMHP) is the Director of the Uplifting Parents Program at Catholic Social Services in Rapid City, South Dakota. Natalie has been inspired by grassroots development through her travels and volunteer work in countries spanning Central America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Natalie is a social work enthusiast and loves to work with communities to solve problems in fun and creative ways to collectively create positive change. Natalie was able to facilitate the creation of the Uplifting Parents program using a Collective Impact Model with the collaboration of more than 20 community partners.

NATALIE LECY

How did you become interested in helping single parents improve their financial or educational situations?

Single parents who are lower income earners face incredible obstacles to pursuing their education due to polarizing responsibilities as a student, parent, and a worker. In my mind, they were an obvious demographic group in need of support services. If their cycle of poverty is interrupted by obtaining a degree, that achievement immediately changes the future trajectory of their children. Also, in my experience, single parents are some of the hardest working and most resilient people I know. They flourish under financial support and mentoring.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

Research plays a very crucial role in reducing poverty. I work with an abundance of caring individuals who do everything in their power to create positive change for the people they serve. Helping people through the healing process is incredibly valuable. However, in order to create more sustainable change, we need more than Band-Aids. We need research to demonstrate the impact of successful interventions so we can proactively inform policies and programs that create change on a systemic level.

Why do you think the Uplifting Parents Program is important?

The Uplifting Parents Program works with individuals and families holistically, and our mentoring reflects the uniqueness of each individual. Our ultimate goal is to move families from poverty to prosperity and we've had the honor of witnessing many of those transitions. It is amazing when you see a family who entered the program homeless or facing another huge obstacle, then two or three years later that parent has obtained a degree, is working full-time, and is no longer in need of economic assistance. This program can help families find the stability they need to thrive.

What is your role in the Uplifting Parents Program?

I am the Program Director of the Uplifting Parents Program. I had the honor of developing the program with the help of our Uplifting Parents Coalition consisting of community members. I currently provide supervision to our program staff, facilitate our coalition of 30+ agencies, and coordinate our research with LEO.

How do you anticipate Uplifting Parents will be improved as a result of LEO's research study?

Through our work with LEO, the Uplifting Parents Program has already standardized its overall program structure so it can be better understood by LEO, as well as possibly replicated by others in the future. As a result of LEO's research study, we also received a significant grant through the John T. Vucurevich Foundation to expand Uplifting Parents so we could work with LEO to conduct an impact evaluation. Our partnership with LEO has helped us engage in community conversations on the importance of bridging research and practice. It has also given UP a platform for demonstrating the impact that community-supported wraparound case management services can have on families trying to escape generational poverty.

What have you gained from working on a LEO research project?

I have realized there are bigger nerds than me! Really, it has been a lot of fun to work with LEO. It has been great for our own program and our agency as a whole because it's helping us to be more intentional about our work. Partnering with LEO has helped us to take a step back from our work, evaluate our methods, and re-engage with it more purposefully. Also, LEO has been a great resource for providing information on emerging trends and best practices from other organizations they have partnered with.



Andrea Ringer joined the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities in June 2017 as a Research Associate. She contributes to project development and assists in managing impact evaluations carried out by the LEO team, currently in the areas of adult college completion, workforce development, senior citizen companion care, transportation, and prisoner re-entry. While a student at Notre Dame, Andrea worked with the service organization La Casa de Amistad in South Bend and assisted with economic research in Nicaragua. With this background, she was drawn to LEO because of its mission to identify effective programs aimed at reducing poverty in the United States. Andrea graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2017 with a B.A. in International Economics.

ANDREA RINGER

What is your role at LEO?

My role at LEO is the position of Research Associate. I provide project management support on several LEO projects, for which I manage day-to-day communications with LEO partners on the project and help with logistics of the evaluation. I also conduct data analysis, both in the preliminary stage of a project to determine whether an evaluation is feasible, and in the analysis stage of a project to determine the effect of the program.

Why did you join LEO?

As an undergraduate at Notre Dame, I heard of LEO's work conducting economic research on poverty in the United States, and I wanted to work for LEO. A job with LEO combines the quantitative skills I learned as an Economics major with my desire to do fulfilling work. LEO's mission - to use research to inform evidence-based programs and reduce poverty in the United States - inspires me. After working for LEO for over a year, I am still inspired by LEO's mission and it makes me happy to do this job every day.

How are you involved in the Uplifting Parents evaluation?

I manage the Uplifting Parents project and assist with implementing the evaluation. Along with LEO co-founder Dr. Bill Evans, I have worked with Catholic Social Services Rapid City to implement the research design, design an online application form for the program, and establish data sharing agreements. Dr. Evans and I had the opportunity to visit CSS Rapid City in order to meet the staff of the Uplifting Parents program and talk to participants about their experience with the program. It has been great to work with CSS Rapid City to implement this evaluation.

In your opinion, what role does research play in reducing poverty?

Research plays an important role in reducing poverty. Many service agencies do great work in providing services to people in need, but many of these programs lack evidence to show whether they are effective at achieving stated outcomes. Research is needed to show which programs are effective, so that ineffective programs can be improved and effective programs can be expanded and replicated to benefit a greater number of people.

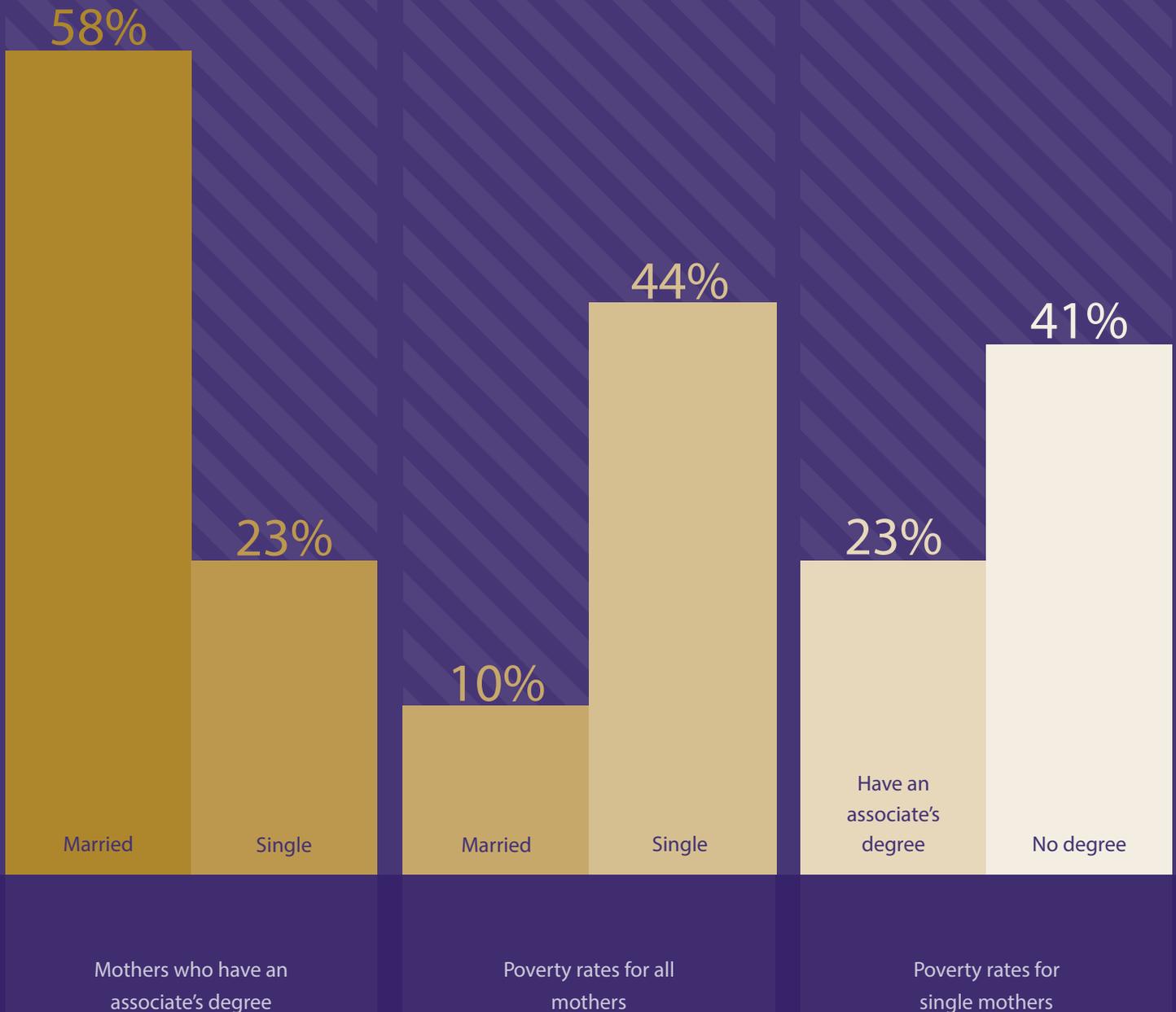
What makes LEO's approach to research unique?

Research is conducted to explore a question of interest and to learn something about the world. LEO is unique in that we ask research questions about specific programs in order to learn what works to improve the outcomes of those in need. LEO conducts evaluations not for the sake of research, but rather to build evidence of effective anti-poverty interventions. Realizing that research alone is not enough, that partnerships with service providers are necessary, and that conducting research is only the first step toward evidence-based policy, is a perspective that makes the LEO approach unique and valuable.

How does LEO's work improve the ability of agency partners to serve those living in poverty?

Service providers oftentimes want to know the impact of their programs, but they frequently don't have the capacity to conduct their own evaluations. Agency partners are good at what they do - serving people - and they put a lot of energy into their services, leaving little space to think about evaluation and larger impact. LEO provides outside capacity for service providers to determine the impact of their programs. By conducting an evaluation with LEO, agency partners learn the effect of their program and areas to improve upon to better serve those in need.

BY THE NUMBERS: SINGLE MOTHERS IN THE U.S.



Statistics come from the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.