

LEO CASE STUDY

April 2018

MENTORING FOR ADULTS NAVIGATING SOCIAL SERVICES: LAUNCHING AN OBJECTIVE IMPACT EVALUATION

AREA: SELF-SUFFICIENCY

In Rochester, New York, an estimated 34% of people live below the federal poverty level. An estimated 16% live in extreme poverty. A recent report identified two obstacles facing individuals working to achieve self-sufficiency: a knowledge gap about available resources and the need for coordinated services. Comprehensive case management can help individuals identify existing services, establish trusting relationships, and navigate the complex network of agencies, resources, and requirements.



"Research is an invaluable tool ... to measure the progress made in eliminating poverty."

Lydia Alston-Murphy
Program Manager, Bridges to Success

WHY EVALUATE?

The **Bridges to Success** program in Rochester pairs professional mentors/navigators with adults living in areas of concentrated poverty. Program participants work with navigators to set goals, build human and financial capital, and increase economic mobility. Stakeholders commissioned the study to learn more about the program's impact on outcomes such as **housing stability, education, and employment**, as well as program cost-effectiveness.

COLLABORATORS

LEO is collaborating with the City of Rochester, Action for a Better Community, Catholic Family Center of Rochester, Community Place of Greater Rochester, Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, and J-PAL at MIT on the study.

1. COMPARING OUTCOMES

LEO studies isolate the impact of a particular program by comparing outcomes for two groups of individuals who are the same, on average, except for the program of interest (i.e., "treatment" and "control" groups). In this case, there is **excess demand** for the Bridges to Success program: more need than available program openings. Given this, LEO helped stakeholders set up an enrollment system where all eligible individuals have a fair and **equal chance** of being offered an available program opening. This, in turn, has enabled a **randomized controlled trial (RCT)** evaluation to rigorously study program impact. Individuals unable to be served due to existing program capacity constraints receive referrals to other social service providers.

2. STUDY SIZE & TIMELINE

The study will consist of 300 individuals: 150 Bridges to Success participants and 150 individuals in a comparison group. The study began in 2017 and will consist of at least two years of data tracking, monitoring, and project management, followed by analysis, reporting, and information sharing with a wide range of practitioners and policymakers.

3. DATA

With support and connections from project stakeholders, LEO will leverage **administrative data** to measure participation in government benefit programs. LEO is also conducting **surveys** at 12 and 24 months to collect outcome data.



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About LEO: The Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) is a nonpartisan research center at the University of Notre Dame. LEO works with nonprofit and government agencies to build objective evidence about programs designed to reduce poverty and improve lives in the U.S. To learn more, please contact us at leo@nd.edu.