ISSUE: SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Many current approaches to fighting poverty provide temporary relief, but do not support individuals and families striving for permanent pathways out of poverty. Innovative programs that take a holistic and comprehensive approach offer an alternative. Such programs help individuals and families identify and address the root causes of poverty and often coordinate across areas such as housing, health, employment, and education.

WHY EVALUATE?

The Padua Pilot is a “supercharged” case management program developed by Catholic Charities Fort Worth to help families experiencing poverty achieve long-term self-sufficiency. The program combines wrap-around case management with low caseloads, detailed needs assessments, customized action plans, and financial assistance. Stakeholders commissioned the study to learn more about the program’s impact on outcomes such as income, employment, and health.

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 Padua Pilot: 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 rigorous randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation to study program impact. Individuals unable to be served due to existing program capacity constraints are offered another service or a referral.

2. STUDY SIZE & TIMELINE

The study involves 427 participants: 193 program participants and 234 individuals in a comparison group. The sample includes two cohorts: the first enrolled in 2015 and the second in 2016. Short-term outcomes will be tracked over 24 months and long-term outcomes for up to five years.

3. DATA

The evaluation utilizes surveys and administrative data to measure outcomes. Baseline information for both groups is collected at enrollment. Participants are invited to retake the survey via an in-person interview with personnel from the University of Wisconsin Survey Center at 12 and 24 months. In addition, LEO will leverage administrative data from the Ray Marshall Center to measure participation in government benefit programs.