



Thinking Outside the Box: Using Emerging Evidence to Create New Pathways Out of Poverty

LaDonna Pavetti

Center on Budget and
Policy Priorities

June 16, 2015

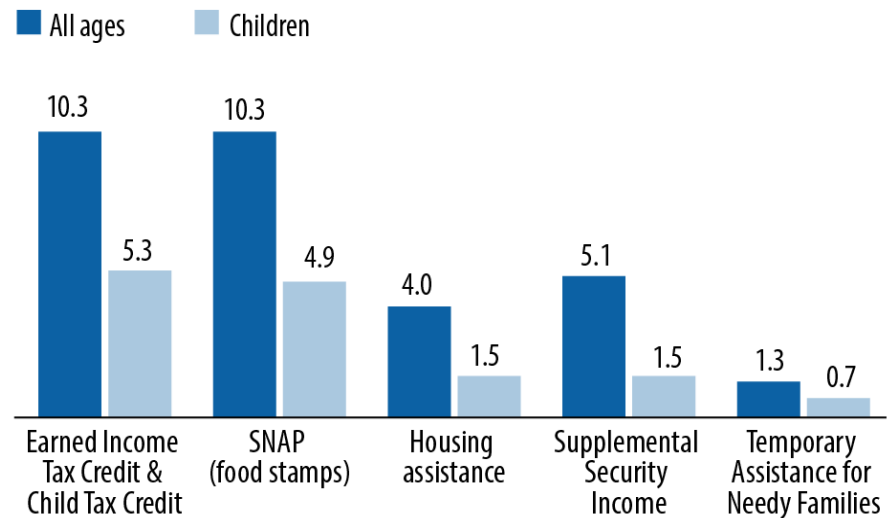


The Safety Net Plays an Important Role in Reducing Poverty

- Nationally, the safety net reduced the poverty rate from 29.1 to 13.8 percent and lifted 48 million people above the poverty line, including 12 million children.
- In 2009/2012, housing assistance lifted 4 million individuals and 1.5 million children out of poverty.

Major Tax Credits and Means-Tested Programs Lifted Millions Out of Poverty in 2012

Millions of people lifted above the poverty line



Note: Figures show the number of people lifted above the poverty line using the federal government's Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) with corrections for underreporting.

Source: CBPP analysis of 2012 Census Bureau data from the March Current Population Survey, SPM public use file; corrections for underreported benefits from HHS/Urban Institute TRIM model.



But Programs of Opportunity Often Disappoint

- Programs of opportunity rarely perform as well as we hope they will
- Modest success, even in the most effective employment programs
- Declining employment opportunities for individuals with limited education

Impetus for Thinking Outside the Box

- Increased focus on reducing poverty and inequality
- Changing landscape of training and workforce programs
- Increasing importance of skills for labor market success
- Two-generation concerns: need to invest in adults to see big improvements in outcomes for kids
- Explosion in brain science has increased our knowledge of the importance of “executive function skills”
- Evidence that if we teach “life skills” we might be able to do better



Executive Function Skills: A New Frontier for Human Service Programs

- Executive functions are ***a set of processes*** that all have to do with ***managing oneself and one's resources*** in order ***to achieve a goal*** (Source: Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Laurie Dietzel)
- It is an umbrella term for skills we use to organize and plan, control how we react to situations, and get things done
- Executive skills are critical for success in school, work and life – poor executive function leads to poor productivity and difficulty finding and keeping a job



Factors That Influence Individuals' Ability to Get and Keep a Job

Labor Market Factors: Availability of jobs; employers' willingness to hire; skills match

Job-search skills

- Resume
- Cover letter
- Master application
- Interviewing
- Networking
- Completing online applications

Job-specific skills

(Examples)

- Customer service
- Computer skills
- Operate a forklift
- CDL
- Writing
- Personal care
- Child development
- Food service prep
- Safety procedures
- Medical billing
- Clerical skills

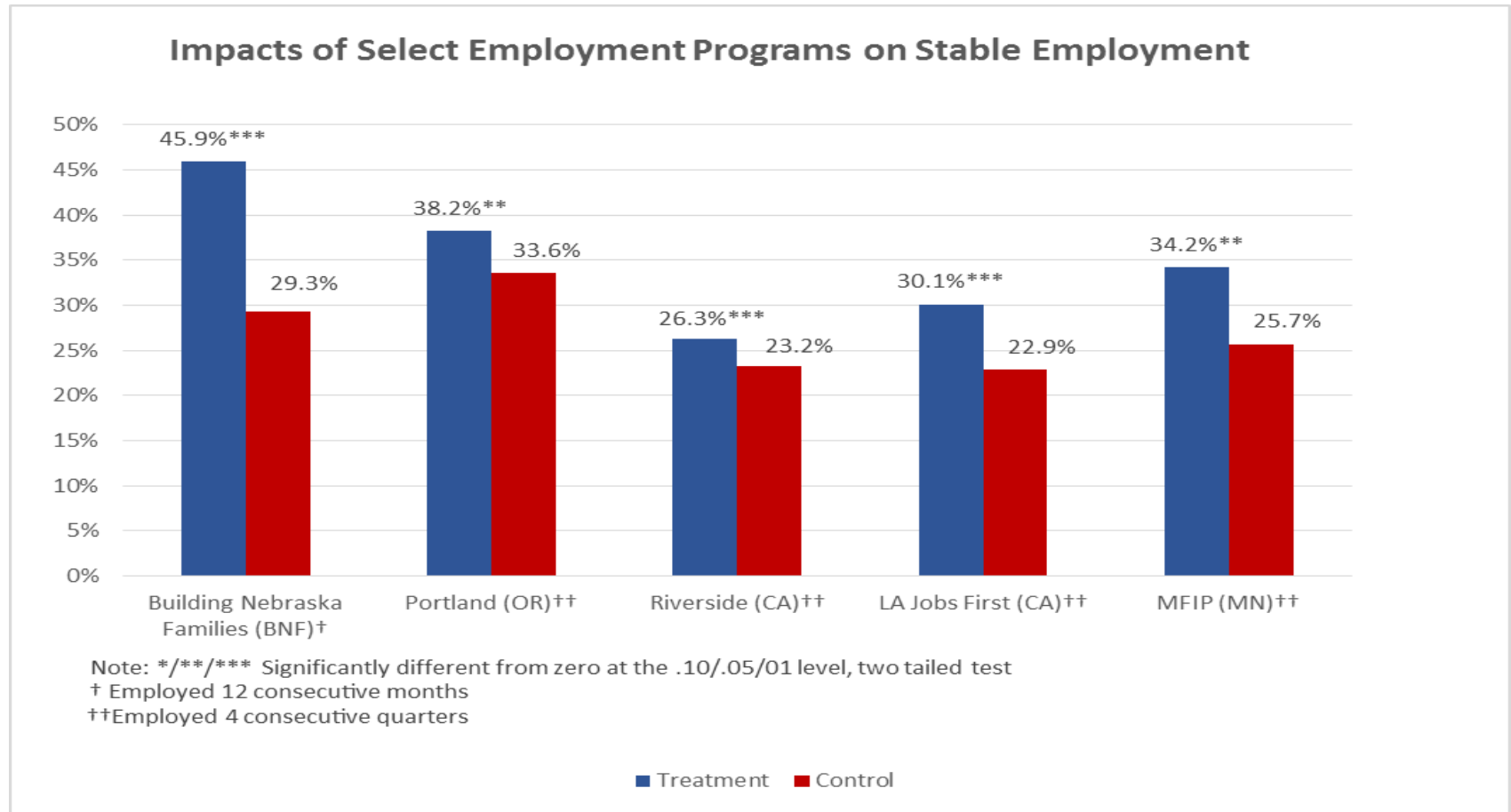
Work/Life Management Skills

- Time management
- Planning/prioritization
- Task Initiation (getting started)
- Stress tolerance
- Organization
- Flexibility
- Emotional control
- Sustained attention
- Working memory
- Goal-directed persistence

Environmental Factors: Transportation infrastructure; availability of work supports such as child care; community support for work; benefit structures that support work



Evidence that moving in new directions could yield positive results: BNF produced much better results than other programs





What was Different?

- Focused on helping individuals to set and achieve individual goals
- Taught “life skills” – time management, budgeting, making good decisions, building self-esteem, stress management
- Services contextualized – delivered in people’s homes
- Well-trained staff
- Achieved significant improvement in employment stability, wages and jobs with benefits without focusing directly on job search skills



Goal Achievement and Executive Function Skills

Executive Function Skills	Goal Achievement Process	Purpose
<i>Metacognition, working memory</i>	Set	<i>Establish meaningful, achievable goals</i>
<i>Planning/prioritization, time management, working memory, task initiation</i>	Plan	<i>Develop a plan for meeting goals</i>
<i>Task initiation, response inhibition, time management, sustained attention, working memory</i>	Act	<i>Put the plan into action</i>
<i>Metacognition, flexibility, working memory</i>	Review/ Revise	<i>Review the plan to assess what worked and revise it as necessary</i>



Implications for Human Service and Work Programs

- More explicit emphasis on goal setting and achievement – how goals are set matters
- More intentional and specific approach to planning – break goals down into manageable steps with explicit plans for achieving them (down to the day and time something will get done)
- “Living” plans that are regularly reviewed and revised
- Different approach to providing support – creating “scaffolds” that break tasks into small steps; provide as much support as is needed to successfully complete the task
- Important role for using incentives to engage participants and build skills
- Explicit attention to the role of executive skill strengths and weaknesses and integration of processes that intentionally support the development of executive function skills or compensate for weaknesses that get in the way of success



A Scaffolding Model for Goal-Setting for Individuals and Organizations

CRITTENTON WOMEN'S UNION'S THEORY OF CHANGE BRIDGE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY®



Mobility Mentoring®

FUTURE ORIENTED DECISION MAKING

FAMILY STABILITY		WELL-BEING		EDUCATION AND TRAINING	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT		EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER MANAGEMENT
Housing	Dependents	Health and Behavioral Health	Social Networks	Educational Attainment	Savings	Debts	Earnings Levels
No subsidy, housing costs less than 1/3 household take-home pay	Dependent needs met; serving as no barrier to parent/guardian school or work	Fully engaged in work, school, and/or family	Advocate/ Networker: Uses own and other resources and connections to advance the mobility goals of others	Completed bachelor's degree or higher	Savings of three months' expenses or more	Current on all balances and no outstanding debt other than mortgage or educational and/or car loans	Job with earnings ≥ Mass. Index wage (If not calculated for specific family, use income ≥ \$65,880)
No subsidy, housing costs exceed 1/3 household take-home pay	Dependent needs serving as minimal disruption to parent/guardian school or work	Minimal disruption to work, school, and/or family due to health / behavioral health issues	Developed Network: Consistent source of both support and leveraging connections	Completed associate's degree or postsecondary job training or certificate program	Savings of more than two months' expenses but less than three months' expenses	Current in payments and plans and paying more than minimum payments	Job with earnings of 66-99% of Mass. Index wage (If not calculated for specific family, use income range of \$43,481 - \$65,879)
Partial subsidy (shallow): Paying \$200 or more towards rent	Dependent needs serving as intermittent disruption to parent/guardian school or work	Intermittent disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health / behavioral health issues	Emerging Network: Consistent source of support and occasional leveraging connections	Attending college or postsecondary job training program	Savings of at least one months' and up to two months' expenses	Structured payment plans in place and meeting minimum payments	Job with earnings of 33%-65% Mass. Index wage (If not calculated for specific family, use income range of \$21,741-\$43,480)
Full subsidy, permanent housing: Paying \$200 or less towards rent	Dependent needs serving as significant obstacle to parent/guardian school or work	Regular and recurring disruptions to work, school, and/or family due to health / behavioral health issues	Limited network: Occasional source of support	Completed postsecondary remedial education classes, college preparatory program, or prerequisites for job training/ readiness program	Savings of less than one months' expenses	Debts in excess of ability to pay, behind in payments	Job with earnings less than 33% Mass. Index wage
A. Homeless / co-housed with family or friends	Recently emergent or not yet addressed dependent needs, requiring additional attention	Severely limited engagement in work, school and/or family due to significant health/ behavioral health issues	Isolated or draining network	Attending postsecondary remedial education classes, college preparatory program, or fulfilling prerequisites for job training/readiness program	No savings	Defaults or nonpayment on all or most loans and accounts	Unemployed
B. Homeless / transitional housing				High school diploma or General Educational Development certificate GED obtained			
Homeless / emergency shelter				No high school diploma or GED			

CONTEXTUALIZED DECISION MAKING



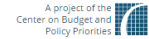
For more Information

- Webinar Series
- Practitioner materials
- Links to useful resources

buildingbetterprograms.org

BUILDING BETTER PROGRAMS

RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING TANF AND RELATED WORK PROGRAMS



SYNTHESIS REPORTS PROGRAM INFO EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SNAP E&T WEBINARS

Executive Function Skills: What They Are and Why They Matter



The webinar is an excellent introduction to how neuroscientists define executive function skills for adults, how executive functions develop and the factors that influence their development. The executive functions that Silvia has found critical for adults are:

- **Self-control** which involves controlling one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It is important for not getting distracted from a goal and not immediately getting angry when someone upsets you.
- **Planning** which refers to the ability to outline long-term goals and identify obstacles and possible solutions. It is the skill that is used to lay out the series of steps needed to achieve goals, including setting appropriate deadlines and reminders.
- **Monitoring** which refers to the moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, behavior and one's progress towards a goal. It is important for assessing how well I am doing at completing the task at hand and whether my behavior is appropriate for the setting

Powerpoint slides in PDF format for this webinar:
[Adult Executive Functions - Presentation by Silvia Bunge \(Slides\)](#)

Search for:

Search

Quick Links to Other Resources

- MDRC
- MATHEMATICA POLICY RESEARCH
- ABT ASSOCIATES
- THE URBAN INSTITUTE
- THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESEARCH CLEARINGHOUSE
- OCTAE - OFFICE OF CAREER, TECHNICAL AND ADULT EDUCATION
- CSG - WHAT WORKS IN REENTRY CLEARINGHOUSE
- COALITION FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY
- CLASP
- NATIONAL TRANSITIONAL JOBS NETWORK
- NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
- CENTER ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
- OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH & EVALUATION
- SNAP E&T