Servicios de La Raza
Mile High United Way

**Youth Experiencing Success
Program Grant - Update
2010-2011**

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Quantitative Research Evaluation & Measurement

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Executive Summary

The *Youth Experiencing Success* program focuses on low-income and indigent at-risk youth ages 14-21 in the Denver metro area. Because at-risk youth experience very high unemployment rates (BLS, 2007), emphasis is placed on youth at-risk populations: pregnant and parenting teens, homeless and runaway youth, dropouts, youth offenders and those at risk of court involvement, youth in foster care, individuals with disabilities, and those who demonstrate basic skills deficiencies.

Central tenets of the program center on seven key criteria associated with youth success in obtaining employment goals for both education and employment. Participants scored in the mid-ranges on all criteria. Overall, case managers indicated that youth had greater understanding of employment components than of educational constructs.

Results also indicated that as youth remained with the program, reliance on family grew while dependence on case manager diminished. None of the participants have entered the final, follow-up phase.

Recommendations for improvement include:
- Build more partnerships for the YES program throughout the city
- Seek to enroll more males in the program
- Alter programming to demonstrate stronger ties to career goals to education and decision-making

Introduction

Mission: To provide and advocate comprehensive, culturally relevant human services, primarily, but not limited to, the Spanish speaking population.

History: In 1972, Servicios de La Raza spearheaded initiatives to embody its mission, namely to provide and advocate comprehensive culturally proficient human services to the Latino, urban, working-class, primarily Spanish speaking communities of the greater metropolitan Denver region. Through establishing a staff of trained professionals, 501c(3) tax-exempt community based agency status, and receiving state licensing as a mental health facility, the mission of Servicios de La Raza began to be actualized. For the past 30 years, Servicios de La Raza has been the only organization of its kind in the state of Colorado that delivers such a wide range of services to the Latino community, through a culturally and linguistically proficient service model. Because of the value placed on the community, culture and language, Servicios de La Raza serves as an integral part of the heart of the Latino community in Denver, a trusted and accessible community resource.

Grant: In 2010, the Mile High United Way awarded Servicios de La Raza to provide a comprehensive range of services for the needs of 100 of Greater Denver's low-income and indigent, at-risk Latino youth, assuring they receive the best supportive services, educational, and workforce opportunities available.   This grant is administered under the SDLR *Youth Experiencing* Success (YES) program –a safety net constructed of multiple points of contact, coordinated with several community partners, and linked closely to the services provided through our Adult Self-Sufficiency programs. The aim of the program is to ensure that families are whole and healthy in all respects

The program will focus on low-income and indigent at-risk youth ages 14-21 in the Denver metro area. Particular emphasis will be placed on youth at-risk populations: pregnant and parenting teens, homeless and runaway youth, dropouts, youth offenders and those at risk of court involvement, youth in foster care, individuals with disabilities, and those who demonstrate basic skills deficiencies. At-risk youth have particular needs that must be addressed sensitively, and with an awareness of the reality of their circumstances.

Evaluation of the program is centered on seven key criteria associated with youth success in obtaining employment goals in two essential categories, and measured in three increments. The information contained in this report remains the property of Servicios de La Raza.

Methodology

Data: Research on existing employment of urban Latino individuals were gained by examining local data from the United States Census (2010), the employment and education monthly supplements of Current Population Survey (2010 and 2011), and the American Community Survey (2007-2009). Data and information specific to this grant were obtained from personnel employed by SDLR and recorded on the *Goals Grid Matrix* –an instrument designed for this program. All quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS V.18 statistical software, ESRI shapefiles printed in Miscrosoft Map 2010, and graphed using 2010 Miscrosoft Excel and Smartdraw VP 2010. Qualitative reviews of case manager comments were analyzed using AtlasTi software.

All data were gathered, stored, analyzed and reported according to the ethical and professional standards maintained by the American Evaluation Association and guidelines adapted for Human Subjects Research. All private (non-public access) data remain the possession and responsibility of SDLR.

Collection: Case managers performed an initial assessment of participants during the first few weeks of enrollment. As SDLR feels that all youth are welcome into the program, regardless of the time of year, an open enrollment system has been established. As a result, participants are at varying stages within the program itself. In order to maintain consistency, participants are tracked according to phases and assessed for gains in both Educational Attainment and Employability.

Phase	Time Frame	Description
Outreach	N/A	Aggressive outreach and initial contact with potential program participants at 11 separate events.
Initial Phase	0-6 Months	Youth enter the program. Case manager assesses youth's employment strengths and weaknesses; goals and needs. Program plan is designed for youth.
Mid-Program Check-Up	6-12 Months	Case manager works with youth as often as needed to ensure gains in both education and employment goals.
Follow-Up Phase	End of Program	Follow-up contact is made with youth to determine overall impact of program.

Because youth are in varying stages of employment and educational readiness when they enter the program, some youth will be in the program longer than others. Each phase of the program is carefully recorded by the case manager for all seven criteria.

Findings

Youth unemployment in the Denver area for Latinos is high. According to the Current Population Survey (2010), youth Latinos and Latinas in the Denver Aurora Metropolitan Statistical Area have 2.4 fewer years of education, earn more than $8,000 less than their non-minority peers, and suffer an unemployment rate of nearly 11 percentage points greater than white young adults.

The map below shows that underemployment of young Hispanics permeates all areas of the city. The darker the shade of blue, the more underemployed Hispanics lives within that Census boundary. With few exceptions, virtually all young Latinos living in the metropolitan area are underemployed.
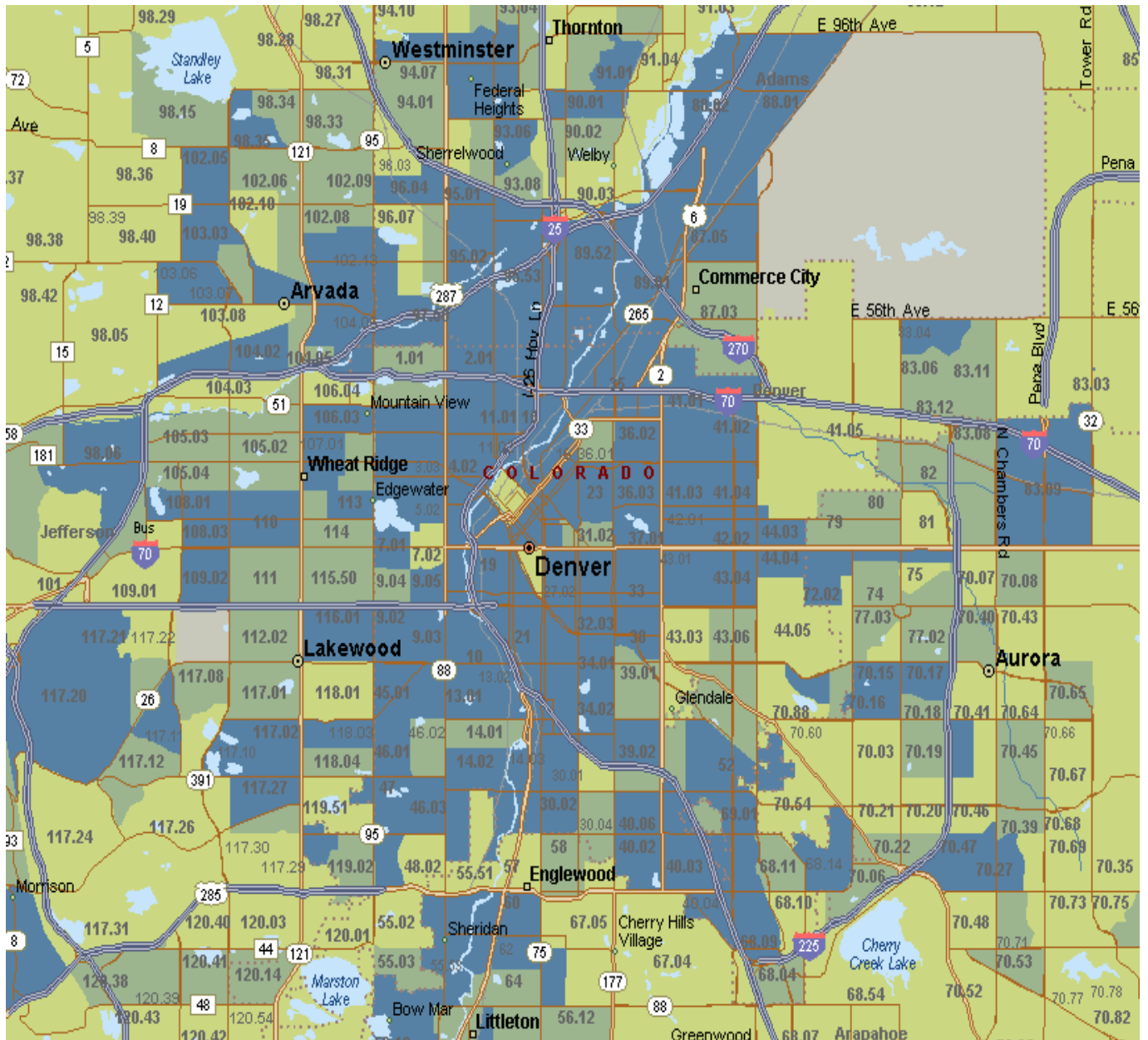
The program began on July 1, 2010. The following table shows the number of participants enrolled in the program at each phase of the program. All youth enrolled in the program are classified as high-risk. Some have come from the juvenile justice system, while others did not graduate from high school.

Phase	Enrollment
Outreach	300
Enrollment	30
Initial Phase	55
Mid-Program	47
Follow-Up	N/A

Participants in the Mid-Program Phase have all completed the Initial Phase. To date, there are a total of 85 participants enrolled in the program. Participation is roughly representative of how Latino males and females access higher education. Because education often results in higher wages and more stable employment, cultural change can alter power dynamics within relationships causing men to see their partners as threatening (Grzywacz et al., 2009)

Participant Gender

Male 46%

Female 54%
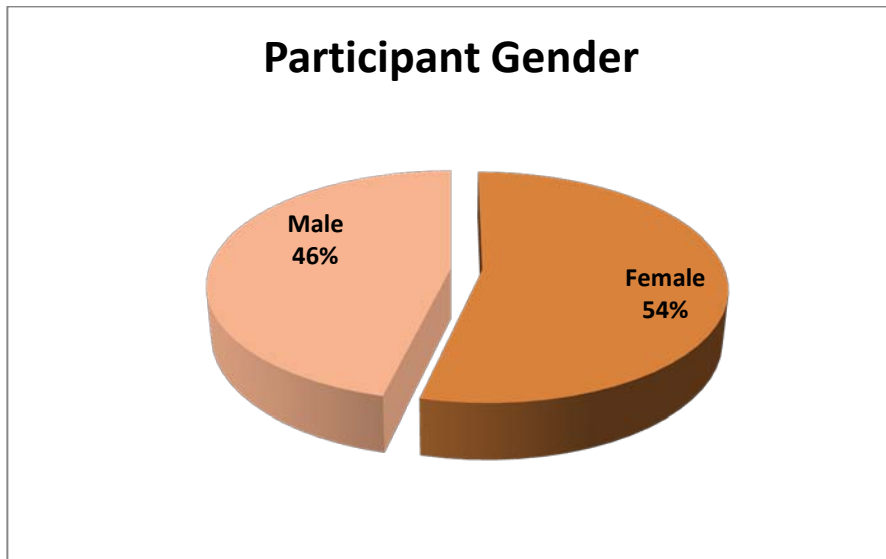
The ages of the participants also reflect when young people finalize their educational qualifications for entry into the job market. Additionally, since 2008 this age group has suffered extraordinarily high unemployment rates. The downturn in the economy has kept older people in their jobs longer, resulting in fewer opportunities for younger people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Age Distribution
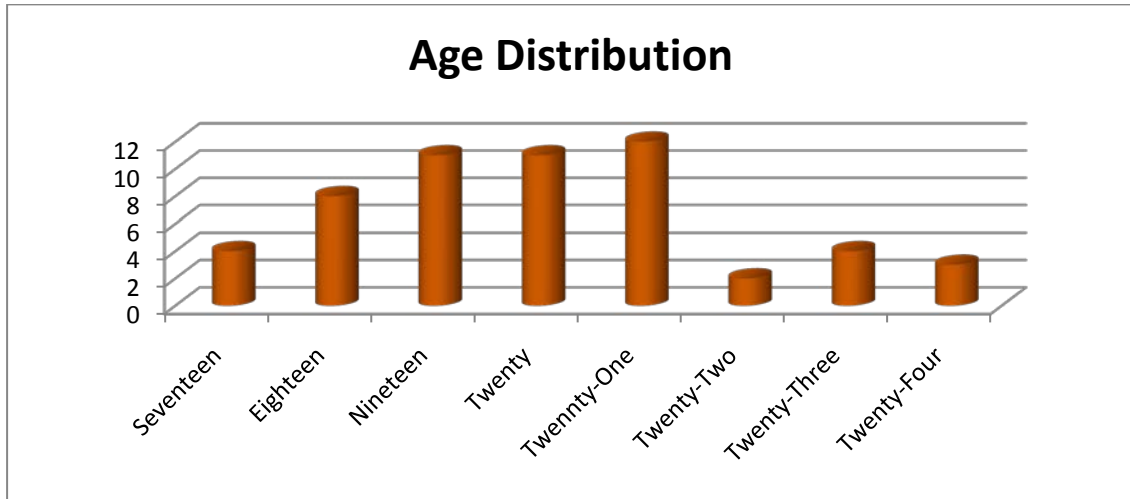
Engaging young adults in attaining higher levels of education for the purposes of improving their employment options is difficult at best. Many minority youth find themselves unprepared for the labor market simply because their education was substandard. The lack of access to resources greatly contributes to Latino underachievement (Hill and Torres, 2010). This holds true especially for education. In terms of available resources, Latinos are the most segregated and underserved racial or ethnic group in the country. Latino communities tend to have the most poorly equipped schools and the poorest school districts.

Evaluation of the program is centered on seven key criteria associated with youth success in obtaining employment goals. These criteria include:
- Parent and Family Support
- Case Management
- Educational Progress
- Decision Making Capacity
- Realistic Goal Setting
- Alignment of Work Skills with Desired Employment
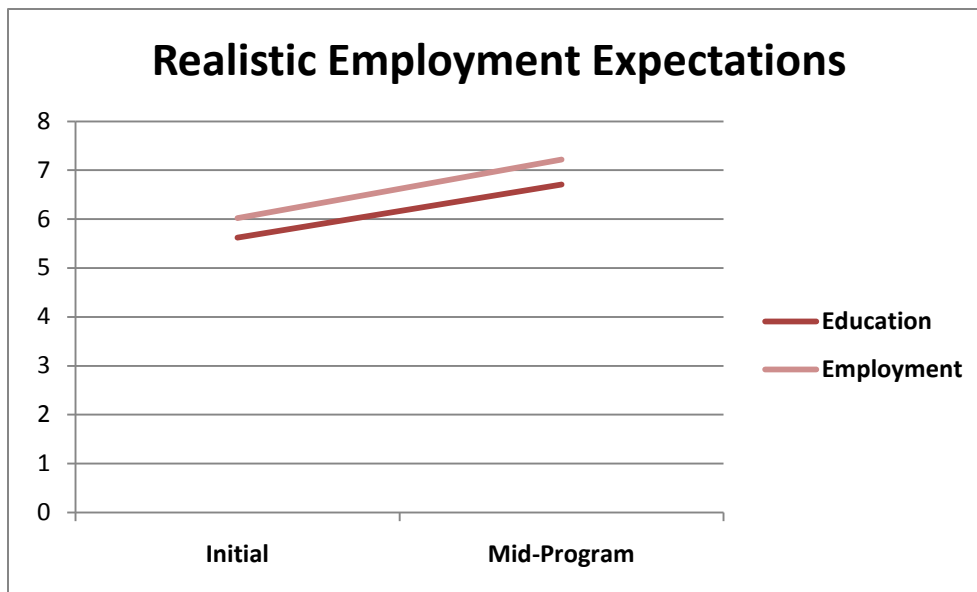- Realistic Employment Expectations

All criteria were scored on a scale of 1-10 (low to high).   Additionally, each of the program participants were assessed under two primary constructs. Because support, capacity, and skills alignment do not progress in predictable increments or to uniform levels, measurements of each of the seven criteria were taken for both Education and Employment.

Overall, participants scored in the mid-ranges on most of the measured criteria. Predictably, Family Support (5.16) was considerably lower than Case Manager Support (7.38).[1] Because a supportive environment is essential for both academic and job-related success (Evans and Greenberg, 2006), strong case management is a critical element for success. *Realism* in goal setting and employment expectations are also crucial. Scores for these two criteria are slightly higher than the median (6.28 and 6.37), indicating that program participants are confident without being overly optimistic.

As indicated in the chart, participants arrive at the program with varying degrees of skills and expectations. Because participants were scored on a 1-10 scale, the uniformity of the standard deviations and size of the variance confirms that while YES participants are all high need, they require individual attention.

	Family Support	Case Manager Support	Educational Progress	Decision Making Capacity	Realistic Goal Setting	Work Skills Matched to Employment Goals	Realistic Employment Expectation
Mean	5.16	7.38	5.60	5.50	6.28	6.09	6.37
Std. Dev.	2.910	2.453	2.855	2.426	2.419	2.359	2.612
Variance	8.466	6.017	8.152	5.883	5.851	5.566	6.823

Closer examination of the constructs associated with successful pathways to employment reveal that participation in the program has positive results. Participant assessments from the Initial Phase to the Mid-Program Check-up increased in a uniform manner.
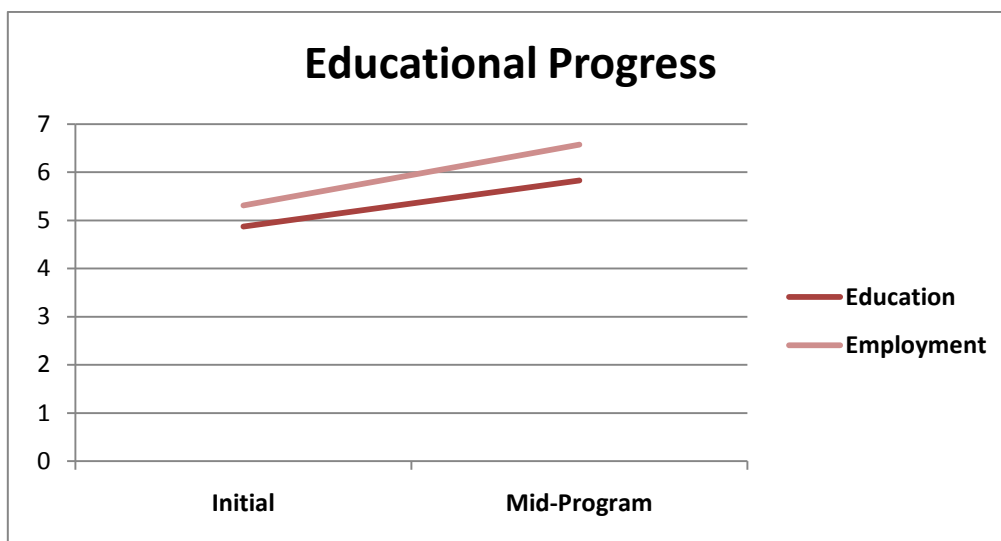

Realistic

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[1] Statistically significant finding at p <.10.

Goal Setting and Employment Expectations increased in participants from their initial assessment to their mid-program check-up. While Education lagged slightly behind Employment, both increased at a nearly uniform rate.

In addition to getting participants to establish realistic goals when it comes to their employment, it is vital that they increase their understanding of the connection between skills' development and education. For both constructs, the YES program participants showed improvement from the beginning of the program to their mid-program assessment.
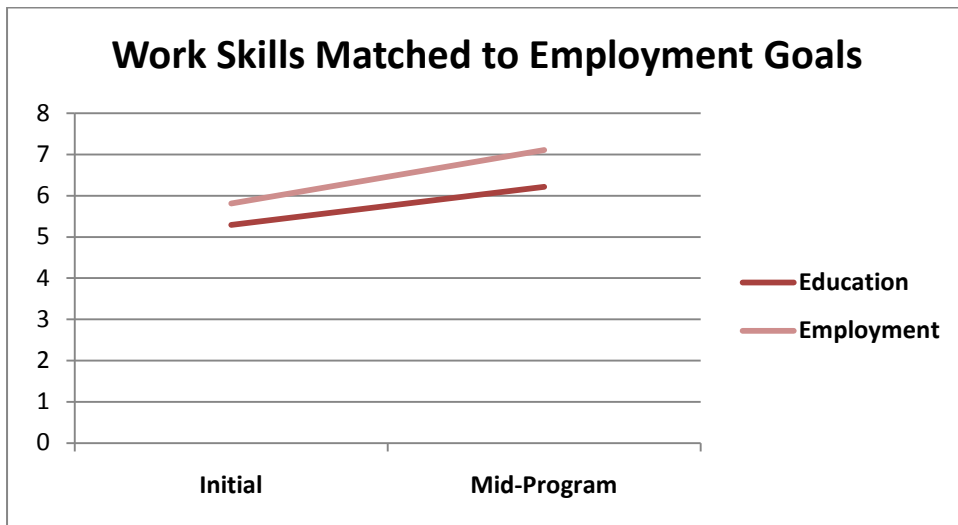

As seen on the chart above, participants demonstrated greater understanding of how employment builds skill development, than education; however, both did improve. It is interesting to see that the same holds true for making progress toward the next level of education. From the chart below, participants linked educational progress more closely with employment than they did education.

At the same time, smaller gains were realized for youth setting realistic goals and their decision-making capacity. Predictably, youth demonstrated very tight relationships between education and employment regarding their ability to set goals and make decisions about their future.

Realistic Goal Setting
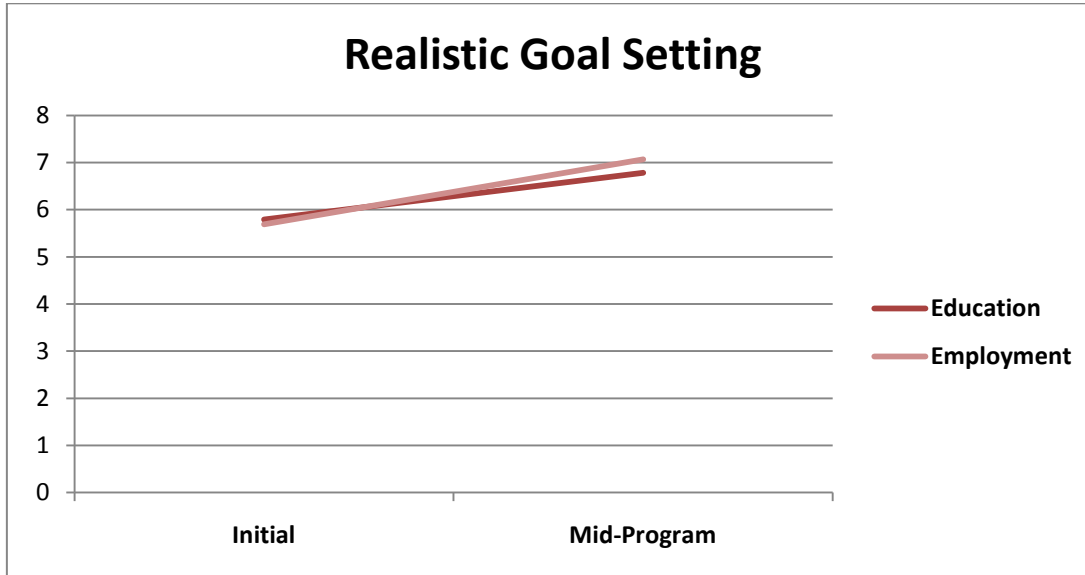
Since the two are closely linked in the workforce development literature –especially for Latino workers (Stern, 2004), participants are likely to benefit from more exercises dedicated to goals-setting, career planning, and decision-making in general.

Decision Making Capacity
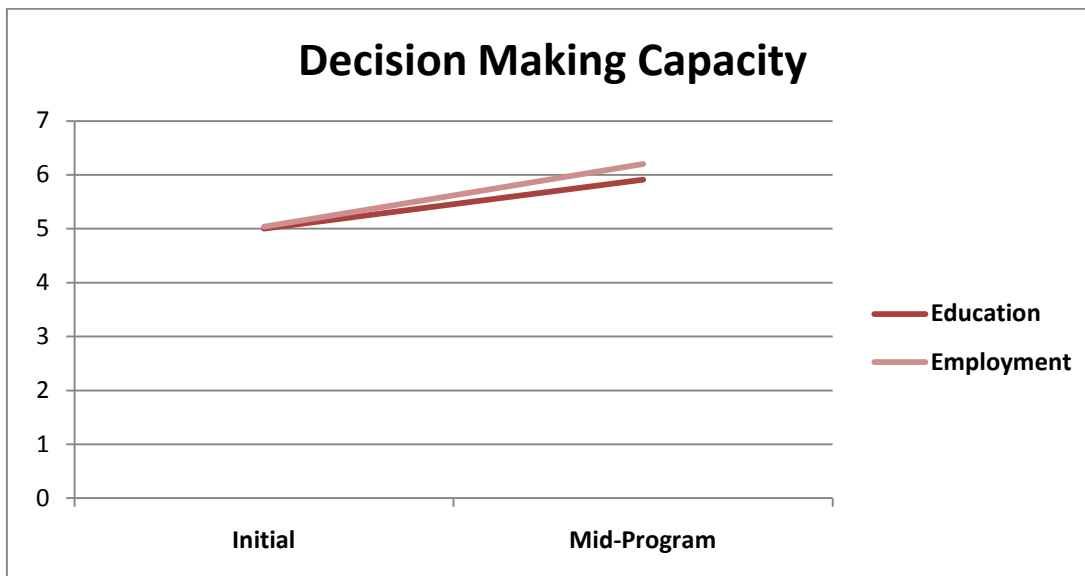
Perhaps the best result of the program rests upon the levels of support participants receive from their families and their case managers. There was a marked improvement of support for both educational and employment success as participants moved through the program. Parents and families of YES youth became more engaged with their children. Of all factors, family support is the greatest determinant of youth success in education (Epstein, 2000) and employment (Holvino, 2008).
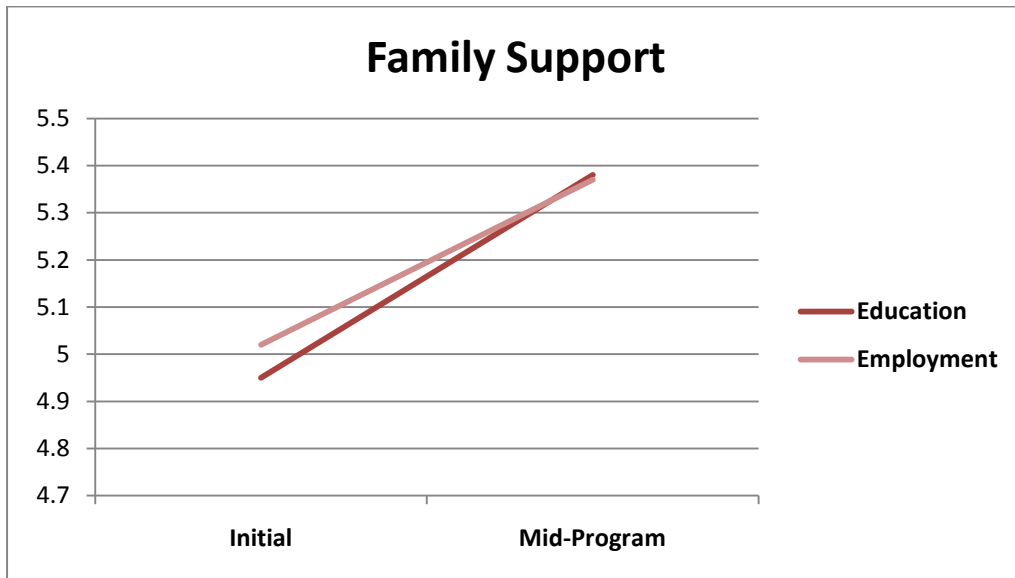
More importantly, participant dependence upon their case manager diminished. This translates into youth becoming more independent –especially on the educational construct. While the dependence level is moderately high, it is a good indication that youth are beginning to apply essential elements of the program to their lives.
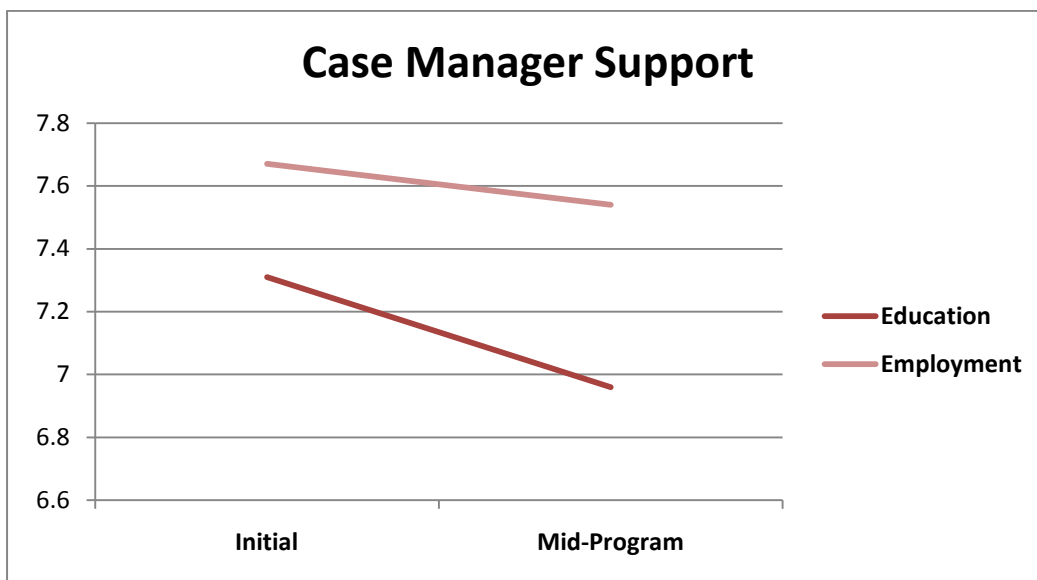
Recommendations

Recommendations for program improvement can be broken into two main areas –specifically organizational and programming.

Organization: The program operates out of Servicios de La Raza and is able to take advantage of their connections. Because the underemployment of young Hispanic adults permeates the entire metropolitan area, it would be beneficial for the YES program to partner more extensively with other, culturally relevant service organizations throughout the city.

Programming: Enroll more young men in the program. Because young Latino men are falling further behind in secondary school and are not accessing post-secondary institutions at the same rate as women, Latino males run the risk of being underemployed for life. Special emphasis should be made to enroll more young men into the YES program.

The program is effective in building family support and increasing participants' understanding of goal setting and decision-making with regard to education and employment. That said, program results are consistently higher for employment than education. In order to make sure that unemployment translates into employment, and that underemployment results in unstable employment, layoffs, and lower earnings, programming should highlight career goals as a being a direct result of both sound decision-making and education.