

# Housing and Employment Navigator Program Evaluation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

In May 2012 the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor awarded a consortium of workforce development councils in Washington State a Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant to implement the Housing and Employment Navigator model for families experiencing homelessness interested in career development and employment services. **Marc Bolan Consulting**, an independent research and evaluation firm, carried out a rigorous random-assignment evaluation study assessing the implementation and impact of the Navigator model in three regions of the state: Pierce County, Northwest (i.e., Whatcom, Skagit and Island Counties), and Yakima County.

The Housing and Employment Navigator intervention draws from earlier models in King and Pierce County. The core intervention relied on the role of the Navigator, an individual who works at a local workforce agency and provides direct support to identified families in helping their efforts to attain jobs, gain needed training, move into permanent housing and attain self-sufficiency. The Navigator assists homeless families through direct support and resources, in helping them understand how to “navigate” support systems, and in bringing together a team of providers to ensure coordinated service efforts.

The intervention differs from the conventional model for workforce development services in its single point of contact approach to addressing interrelated issues that are formidable on their own but increasingly complicated when combined with a housing emergency. The Navigator serves as a conduit to other service providers and helps coordinate what could otherwise become disconnected responses to crisis situations. The Navigators could also draw on a financial “attainment fund” (i.e., flexible dollars that could be accessed to address emergent and/or time-sensitive issues) and provide clients with money for a variety of basic needs and support services and when other funds weren’t available.

### METHODOLOGY

The Housing and Employment Navigator intervention was directed at homeless families who did not face extensive barriers to seeking employment, and expressed interest in receiving career development services. Housing providers from the three regions screened and referred potential participants (i.e., family heads of households) and those enrolling were randomly assigned to the Navigator (i.e., Treatment) or Control study groups. Navigator group participants were connected to the local workforce development agencies and offered the intervention. In total 659 individuals enrolled in the study between March 2013 and October 2015.

The evaluation study examined the implementation and impact of the Navigator model. The evaluation team utilized quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data from and about the participants, data from the Navigators, and data from project stakeholders. The primary data included participant surveys completed at baseline and 9-months, interviews with some Navigator group participants, interviews with project staff and stakeholders, and activity session data recorded by the Navigators.

We obtained data-sharing agreements with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Washington State Department of Commerce (COM) and the Washington State

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<sup>1</sup> The full evaluation report “Housing and Employment Navigator Program Evaluation” **Marc Bolan Consulting** June 2017 is available from Workforce Central Tacoma or online at [www.marcbolanconsulting.com](http://www.marcbolanconsulting.com).

Employment Security Department (ESD) to access secondary data on housing, employment, and utilization of public assistance sources. This included housing data from the State Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), employment data from the State Wages/UI data system and public assistance data from the DSHS Integrated Client Database.

The intent was to look for differences in short- and long-term outcomes between those in the Navigator and Control groups. We were able to access some data sources for as long as 40 months after start in the study for some participants, and focused on 18-month follow-up for the primary analytic comparisons. The specific research questions looked at differential outcomes for the groups over time.

***“Short-Term” Outcomes (comparison between baseline and 9-month client survey data)***

1. Do Navigator participants demonstrate larger increases in **self-efficacy**?
2. Do Navigator participants demonstrate larger reductions in their **family barriers to success**?
3. Do Navigator participants demonstrate larger increases in their **participation in education and training programs**?

***“Long-Term” Outcomes (based on comparison at 18-months follow-up using administrative data)***

1. Do Navigator participants demonstrate higher **rates of employment** by 18-month follow-up?
2. Do Navigator participants demonstrate higher **rates of permanent housing** by 18-month follow-up?
3. Do Navigator participants receive lower **monetary Food Stamp allocations** by 18-month follow-up?
4. Do Navigator participants receive lower **TANF cash amounts** by 18-month follow-up?
5. Do Navigator participants demonstrate **lower rates of DSHS Medical Eligibility** by 18-month follow-up?
6. Do Navigator participants demonstrate higher **rates of employment retention** by 18-month follow-up?
7. Do Navigator participants demonstrate higher **average maximum hourly wages** by 18-month follow-up?

A second emphasis of the study was to assess the potential impact of the intervention on the system of supports available for homeless families in need of career-development services. The interview data provided by staff, Navigators, stakeholders, and participants addressed the following questions:

1. What are the participants working on with program Navigators? Which elements of the program delivery seem to be **working well and which not as well**?
2. How have the types of **activities used by Navigators** changed over the duration of the project? Are the Navigators utilizing new tools, methods or approaches as they gain experience with the model?
3. How has **collaboration and coordination** between service providers working with the families experiencing homelessness changed over time? Are partners working together more efficiently, in a more coordinated fashion, without duplication of services, or in new and different ways?
4. Have other service **providers enhanced their ability to meet the needs of** their clients as a result of the project? Are these providers using approaches, methods or tools gleaned from their collaborative work with the Navigators?

## **KEY FINDINGS**

The overall findings suggest that there are some differences in the long-term outcomes between the study groups that start to emerge at the 18- and 24-month follow-up points. This is particularly true when looking at measures of housing permanency, employment and employment retention. We see less evidence of these differences looking at measures of hourly wages and utilization of public assistance sources such as TANF, food assistance and DSHS medical eligibility. The most notable difference in the short term is with participation in education and training programs where the 9-month

rate is significantly higher for Navigator participants. The qualitative data indicate that the Navigator intervention successfully filled a gap in services for the target population and has impacted the manner by which providers serve homeless families seeking career development services.

**Housing Permanency**

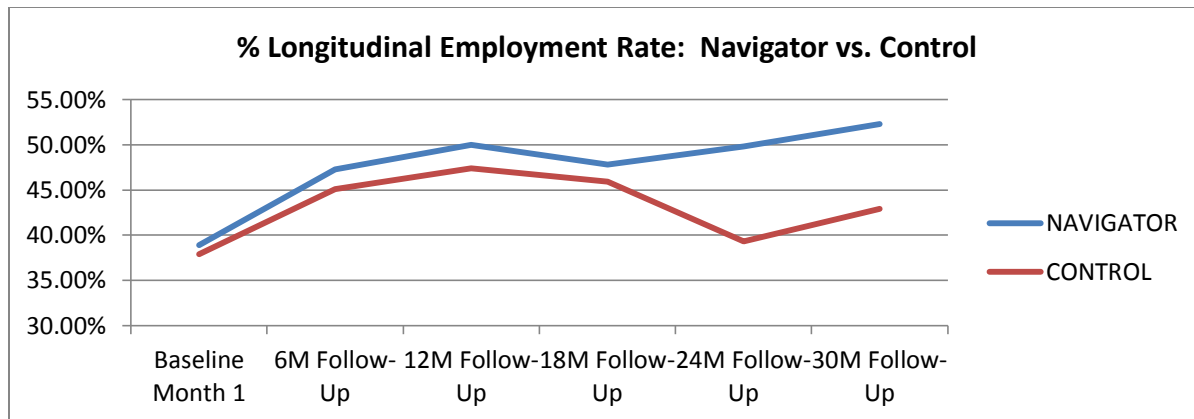
- **There are modest, though not statistically significant, differences in housing permanency for the two groups by the 18- and 24-month follow-up.** At 24 months the housing permanency rate for the Navigator participants (63.0 percent) is nearly 6 percent higher than the Control group (58.4 percent). The project interviews highlighted examples of the collaborative work between the Navigators and housing providers to support participants. Many of these participants spoke of how the Navigators helped them address immediate and long-term housing challenges, working closely with the providers to overcome barriers. Additionally, the Navigator activity data indicate that Navigators worked with a high percent of participants on housing issues.
- **We find that among those who started in 2014 and 2015, the housing permanency rates are higher for the Navigator participants.** This suggests that Navigator participants starting in later years may have benefitted from 1) Navigators gaining skills from working consistently with providers on housing related issues, 2) an increased willingness among Navigators to use attainment funds to support direct housing needs, and 3) the emergence of more Section 8 housing vouchers in some localities coupled with participants’ enhanced ability to access subsidized units.

Housing Permanency	NAVIGATOR	CONTROL
18-Month Follow-Up	56.1%	53.4%
24-Month Follow-Up	63.0%	58.4%

	START: 2013		START: 2014		START: 2015	
	NAVIGATOR	CONTROL	NAVIGATOR	CONTROL	NAVIGATOR	CONTROL
% “Permanent” by 18M	55.8%	62.9%	53.7%	48.2%	62.8%	47.8%
% “Permanent” by 24M	64.1%	65.6%	62.2%	53.1%		

**Employment**

- **At 18 months the Navigator group employment rate is about 3 percent higher than the Control group and by 24 months there is a statistically significant difference between the study groups, with the rate over 7 percent higher for the Navigator participants.** Additionally, at 24 months the Navigator Employment Retention (*i.e., employed for 6 consecutive months in the follow-up time period*) rate is over 10 percent higher, significantly greater than the Control group rate. There is no difference, however, in the average hourly wage levels for the two groups.



- **The interview and program activity data demonstrate how the Navigators capitalized on their expertise and experience with the workforce development system and spent substantial time helping individuals with employment readiness and employability skills, and connecting them with career education and training programs.** There was an intentional use of the career-development model with an emphasis on preparing individuals for employment in advance of job placement. This approach may have delayed entry to unsubsidized employment, but paid off in the long run as individuals obtained the skills and training required for longer-term success.
- **Among participants starting in 2013, the 18- and 24-month employment and employment retention rates are higher for the Navigator participants, and at 18 months the average hourly wage is \$0.47 higher.** Similarly, among those starting in 2014, the long-term employment and retention rates are higher for Navigator participants. Towards the end of the study period, the Navigators shifted their focus to stability and employment and away from the career-development model. This shift likely addressed immediate needs, but perhaps did not provide 2015 participants with as much emphasis on developing skills needed to maintain these jobs moving forward.
- **Participants working with Navigators more often and consistently have higher longer-term employment and retention rates.** The 18- and 24-month follow-up employment and retention rates are higher for those who had 15 or more activity sessions in their first 10 months. The long-term employment and retention rates are also higher for those who worked more with Navigators on Employment specific activities, including Career, Job Search, Placement and Retention.

#### **Utilization of Public Assistance**

- **There is no difference between the study groups in the utilization and amount of TANF assistance over time.** At Baseline, the percent of Navigator participants utilizing TANF support is 8 percent higher than for the Control group. There is some convergence between the two groups, but the Navigator group stays 4-5 percent higher by the 18- and 24-month follow-up. Additionally, the average amount of TANF assistance per person is equivalent for the groups across follow-up periods.
- **There is little difference in the utilization rates or the amount of food assistance per person between the two study groups.** Nearly all of the participants were on food assistance at the outset of the project and by 24 months about 80 percent were still accessing this support. Moreover, the average amount of assistance per person is roughly the same over time for the two groups.
- **The percentages of Navigator and Control group participants eligible for DSHS Medical insurance are equivalent at the 18- and 24-month follow-up periods.** Nearly 94 percent of participants were eligible at baseline and the rate is over 82 percent at the 18- and 24-month follow-up.
- **The data from the interviews, coupled with feedback from WDC program staff, suggest that contrary to our expectation, the Navigators may have actually been advocating for participants to**

increase or extend their access to benefits in the short to medium term. There are instances where participants qualified, but were not accessing these resources. While some participants were making improvements in areas such as employment that might lead to less need for public assistance, others were connecting back to these needed resources.

### Short Term Outcomes

- **While there is a significant increase in the average number of training and educational programs participated in between the baseline and 9-month assessment for the Navigator participants, the average remains constant for the Control participants.** By 9 months, those in the Navigator group participated in, on average, 0.79 more training/educational programs. The Navigator participants report increased participation in Basic Skills/Education, GED, Occupational/Work Training, On-the-Job Training and Internship programs.
- **Additionally, while self-reported levels of educational attainment increase slightly for the Control participants, they improve considerably for the Navigator group.** The percent reporting having more than a HS degree or GED increases by 8 percent over that time period.
- **The levels of reported family barriers to success significantly decline for both groups.** For Navigator participants there are decreases in areas that align with the aims of the intervention (e.g., transportation, stable housing, past work experience, lack of education and financial resources).

#### KEY SHORT TERM SURVEY MEASURES: Navigator vs. Control Group

	CONTROL (n=192)		NAVIGATOR (n=285)	
	Baseline	9M	Baseline	9M
Average Ranking of Challenges (0-3 scale)	1.05	0.87	1.02	0.85
Average # of Reported Current Challenges	6.09	5.22	5.90	5.02
Average # Programs Participated in	1.05	1.04	1.02	1.81
Reports having more than a HS Degree/GED	50.1%	53.0%	40.7%	48.6%

\* shaded cells indicate significant difference at  $p < .05$  based on paired sample t-test

### Model Implementation and System Change

- **The interviews and activity data illustrate the importance of team collaboration between support partners in addressing the needs of Navigator participants.** Beyond the one-on-one work with participants, the Navigators worked closely with housing providers, WDC staff, and DSHS workers to advocate for participants and to enhance the collaboration and communication among providers.
- **Navigators were effective in helping individuals address issues and challenges.** This often involved connecting them to different support resources, helping them understand how to negotiate complex systems like DSHS, and teaching them how to deal with other providers. The intent of the Navigator was to be flexible enough to enhance the individual's career development needs and quickly address barriers that could prevent their progress toward that goal.
- **Strategic use of the monetary attainment fund (i.e., flexible funds) helped participants address short-term challenges and make progress towards long term-goals.** Over ¾ of the Navigator group participants received monetary support for a wide range of different needs.
- **The Navigators filled an important gap in the past system of service provision to homeless families interested in career development.** The Navigator model represents a more intensive approach to working with individuals, one that intentionally sought to enhance the participants' connections to other support providers in a way that had not been in place before. Additionally, the close collaboration between the Navigators and other partners created an atmosphere where knowledge and practices could be developed, shared and extended to work with other populations.