



# Project Rise: Reconnecting Disconnected Youth

## A summary of findings from the Project Rise implementation report Introduction

In the United States, 1.6 million young people between 18 and 24 years old, approximately 6% of that age group, are disconnected from both school (lacking either a high school degree or equivalent) *and* the job market.<sup>1</sup> Neglecting these young people can exact a heavy toll, not only on the individuals themselves but also on society as a whole. Project Rise, which was designed based on lessons from CEO’s Young Adult Internship and Young Adult Literacy programs, seeks to reconnect these young people, who enter the program with very low literacy levels, with education, work, and social support as a pathway to a brighter future. MDRC examined the implementation of Project Rise in three cities and the outcomes for young people in this program. MDRC’s findings are outlined in this report, “Engaging Young People in Education and Work.”

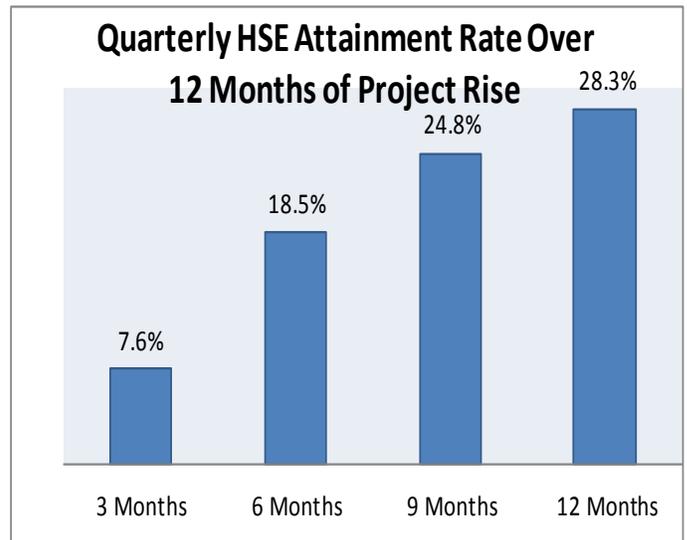
### What is Project Rise?

Project Rise is being conducted under the auspices of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Project Rise is part of CEO and the Mayor’s Fund to Advance NYC’s SIF project, which also includes four other programs. Project Rise is a cohort-based initiative that provides educational and employment opportunities to youth ages 18-24 who are neither working nor in school and read at a 6th grade level or above (but half must be reading below an 8th grade level). The program provides educational classes, connections to paid internship opportunities, and case management services. Project Rise sites are located in New York City, Kansas City, and Newark.

### Key Findings

- Contrary to expectations, participants were attracted to Project Rise more by the education component than by the paid internship opportunity.
- Within 12 months of enrolling in Project Rise, more than a quarter of participants earned a high school equivalency credential at a steady progress, as illustrated in **Chart 1**, or a high school diploma, and about one quarter of participants entered unsubsidized employment in this timeframe.
- Enrolling young people in cohorts with their peers, as well as the support of case managers and other adult staff, seems to help promote participant engagement. The internships also appear to have a modest influence on engagement.
- On average, class attendees received approximately 160 hours of instruction, much higher than usual HSE programs, as illustrated in **Chart 2**, and over half of internship participants worked more than 120 hours.
- It may be important to consider intermediate or nontraditional outcome measures in programs for disconnected young people, since such measures may reflect progress that is not apparent by relying exclusively on more traditional ones. Examples of additional outcomes to measure could include improved communications, priority setting, and academic growth measured by non-HSE assessments.

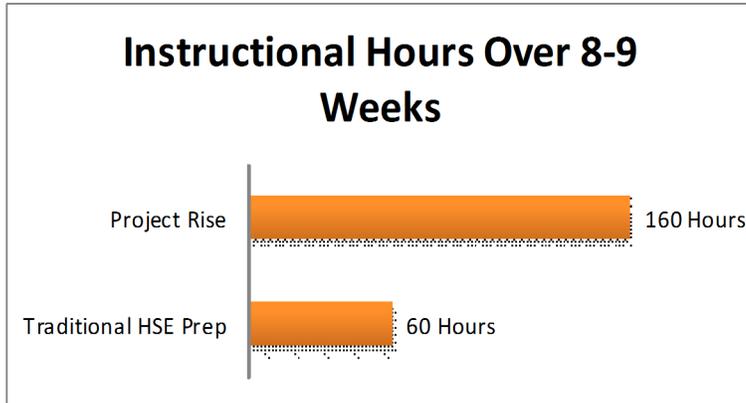
**Chart 1: Disconnected Youth Made Steady Progress in HSE Attainment**



*Note: this chart, as with all the quantitative data in the report, represents Cohorts 2 through 5. However, the program has continued operations and is now serving Cohort 9.*

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, 2012.

## Chart 2: Higher Dosage of HSE Instruction than Traditional HSE Program Models



### Affecting Policy

National attention on the challenges facing disconnected youth creates an opportunity for the Project Rise program lessons to affect policy nationwide. These findings come at a time when the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has made several important changes directing greater attention to disconnected youth. WIOA directs states and localities to focus more funding on out-of-school youth and allows young people up to age 24 to be served by WIOA funds. The Project Rise findings can be particularly applicable for communities looking for models to serve out of school youth with educational and workforce support.

### Project Rise Partners

**Lead Partners:** NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC, and MDRC.

**Providers:** New York City, NY — Henry Street Settlement, The Door, and Kingsborough Community College; Kansas City—Full Employment Council, Newark—Rutgers University T.E.E.M. Gateway.

**Funding Partners:** The Social Innovation Fund of the Corporation for National & Community Service, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Open Society Foundations, The Rockefeller Foundation, Goldman Sachs, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the Hall Family Foundation, Haas Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Kansas City Power and Light District, Newark Public Schools, New York Community Trust, Nicholson Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, the Prudential Foundation, the Valentine Perry Snyder Foundation, Tiger Foundation, United Way of Greater Kansas City, United Way of Kansas City Young Leaders Society, and Victoria Foundation.

### Building Evidence

Research and best practice suggest that programs for disconnected youth should include certain core features, including a combination of well-implemented education, work, and other activities; creation of a positive group identity among participants; connection to caring adults; opportunities for participants to serve as leaders in the community; and a smooth transition to post-program employment and continued education. Project Rise includes these components, and builds on two pioneering models in NYC: the Young Adult Literacy Model (YAL) and the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP). Evaluations of both programs identified promising strategies for engaging out of school and out of work youth. An upcoming randomized control trial (RCT) of YAIP will add more evidence to the field.

### Related Research

Learn more about Project Rise and the programs that inspired its development:

- [\*Engaging Disconnected Young People in Education and Work: Findings from the Project Rise Implementation Evaluation\*](#)
- [\*Project Rise Policy Brief\*](http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Reconnecting_Disconnected_young_Adults_1.pdf) [http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Reconnecting\_Disconnected\_young\_Adults\_1.pdf]
- [\*Testing the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs\*](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/testing-next-generation-subsidized-employment-programs) [http://www.mdrc.org/publication/testing-next-generation-subsidized-employment-programs]
- [\*Improving Outcomes for New York City's Disconnected Youth: Lessons from the Implementation of the Young Adult Literacy Program\*](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/yalp-ceo_2015_report.pdf) [ http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/yalp-ceo\_2015\_report.pdf]
- [\*Evaluation of the Young Adult Internship Program \(YAIP\): Analysis of Existing Participant Data\*](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/yaip_report_2009.pdf) [ http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/yaip\_report\_2009.pdf]