

Balancing Reform Options for Child SSI Recipients

David Wittenburg

Disability: Inherent Problems, Practical Solutions, and Action for Reform

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What we know about child SSI recipients

- **Diverse characteristics**
- **Importance as anti-poverty program**
- **Relatively poor young adult outcomes**
 - E.g., Low employment, high dropout rates
- **Differences in access to other state/local services**

Current Situation Dictates Need for Balanced Approach

- **Inadequate evidence basis for overhaul of system**
 - **Untested option could result in harm to youth with disabilities, taxpayers, or both**
- **Federal budget options should balance**
 - Short-Term Savings** ↔ **Long-Term Savings**
 - Federal SSI Expenditures** ↔ **Other Expenditures (e.g. juvenile justice)**

Some Evidence Basis Exists from Youth Transition Demonstration

- Insights into design options
- Issue Brief: [The Youth Transition Demonstration: Lifting Barriers for Youth with Disabilities](#)

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The Youth Transition Demonstration: Lifting Employment Barriers for Youth with Disabilities

Thomas Fraker

The transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities can be especially difficult. Besides the host of issues facing all youth at this age, young people with disabilities face unique challenges related to health, social isolation, service needs, the potential loss of benefits, and lack of access to supports (Osgood et al. 2010). These challenges complicate their planning for future education and work, often leading to poor education and employment outcomes, dependence on public programs, and a possible lifetime of poverty (Davies et al. 2009).

The cost of providing disability benefits to young people is quite high. In 2011, 1,136,000 youth age 13 to 25 were receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits totaling \$8.0 billion (Social Security Administration 2012a). In the same year, 213,000 people age 25 and under were receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) benefits totaling \$1.5 billion (Social Security Administration 2013). Many other young people are at high risk of receiving SSI or DI benefits in the future if they do not successfully make the transition to paid employment as adults. Some of them have disabilities that are currently not severe but are expected to worsen over time. Others are currently ineligible for benefits because of their parents' incomes but might become eligible after reaching age 18, especially if they move out of their parents' households.

The Youth Transition Demonstration

Recognizing the importance of providing support to young people with disabilities at this critical juncture in their lives, the Social Security Administration (SSA) launched the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) in 2003 (Fraker and Rangarajan 2009). Focusing on youth age 14 to 25, SSA invested considerable resources in developing and evaluating promising strategies to help youth with disabilities become as economically self-sufficient as possible. YTD projects around the country offered services designed to lift the barriers facing these youth as they grow into adults. YTD also included SSA waivers of disability program rules to allow young workers to keep more of their benefits as their earnings increased.

Mathematica Policy Research and its partners are rigorously evaluating YTD using an experimental design. In this design, youth with disabilities who had agreed to be in the evaluation were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group. The treatment group was eligible for both the waivers and YTD services, whereas the control group followed standard SSA program rules and could only access the non-YTD services that happened to be available in their communities. Because of the random assignment, the two groups were expected to be equivalent at the

YTD COMPONENTS

- Work-based experiences
- Youth empowerment
- Family involvement
- System linkages
- SSA waivers and benefits counseling

beginning of the study; consequently, any observed differences in their outcomes could be attributed to YTD. The evaluation team is tracking employment, earnings, and benefits, among other outcomes, to assess whether YTD helped youth find jobs and reduced their dependency on SSI and DI. The evaluation also includes a comprehensive study of the implementation of YTD.

All YTD project operations funded by SSA had ceased as of the writing of this brief in February 2013; evaluation activities are ongoing, however, with a scheduled completion date of September 2014.

YTD Components

Because SSA wanted to test a solid set of program elements grounded in best practices, the YTD components were based on *Guidelines for Success*, a handbook developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2005). *Guidelines* was informed by an extensive review of research, demonstration projects, and effective practices covering a wide range of programs.

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Possible Options

- **State/local tests**
 - Integrate cash with other state/local services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation)
- **Test designs to promote youth outcomes**
 - Several options exist
 - e.g., defined transitional supports in lieu of age 18 redetermination

Contact Information

David Wittenburg
Center for Studying Disability Policy
Mathematica Policy Research
P.O. Box 2393
Princeton, NJ 08543-2393

dwittenburg @mathematica-mpr.com

www.DisabilityPolicyResearch.org