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# An Outcome Evaluation of the YouthBuild USA Offender Project

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## Abstract

A number of intervention and prevention programs exist with respect to juvenile delinquency but most are never evaluated, and of those that do, few are successful in their ability to reduce criminal activity. This article reports on an initial, preliminary outcome evaluation of a targeted intervention program aimed at low-income, 16 to 24-year-old offenders, the YouthBuild (YB) Offender Program. Results indicate reduced recidivism and improved educational outcomes for the YB participants. Theoretical, empirical, and policy-related issues and future directions are outlined.

## Keywords

YouthBuild, intervention, job training, delinquency

## Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has always been a central concern among academics, policy makers, politicians, and the general public, with researchers documenting a strong relationship between juvenile and adult offending (Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003) as well as highlighting the significant costs associated with the most serious and frequent offenders (Cohen and Piquero, 2009). Rates and trends of juvenile delinquency have varied over time and rose to national attention in the late 1980s/early 1990s with the emergence of the crack epidemic and the toll it exerted on adolescents—particularly African American adolescents in the United States. Although the crime rates of juveniles trended downward throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, there has been a recent increase in their level of criminal (especially violent) activity in certain locales. In addition, although high school graduation rates have hovered about 80–85% for more than a decade, the changing global landscape makes educational attainment more of a priority than ever, especially because of the linkage between (lack of) educational attainment and criminal activity.

A wide range and large number of “stay-in-school,” delinquency, and crime prevention and intervention programs are targeted at children and adolescents (Greenwood, 2006), the great many

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of which include a wide variety of treatment and service options. The efficacy and effectiveness of the majority of these programs are mixed and vary according to many criteria (Welsh & Farrington, 2006). Nevertheless, several programs have been found to improve educational outcomes and lower delinquent and criminal activity, but the long-term effectiveness of reduced crime is less developed (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004; Aos, Millar, & Drake, 2006; Greenwood, 2006).

One such program is the YouthBuild (YB) USA Offender Project, a targeted intervention focusing on 16 to 24-year-old offenders, that is organized around employment (within the context of building/rehabilitating housing) and educational training, two programmatic efforts that have been generally shown to have some—albeit modest—success at preventing crime (Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, & MacKenzie, 2002). This study presents an initial outcome evaluation of the YB Offender Project, but before presenting the results of this effort, we first provide some background on the YB effort more generally.

## Background on the YB Program

YB is a comprehensive program targeting low-income young adults with troubled pasts. The program includes a “combination of education, skill-building, counseling, leadership development, community service, positive values and relationships, high standards of behavior, and clear pathways to a productive future” (Leslie, 2007, p. 1). A brief description of the program follows:

During the 9- to 24-month, full-time YouthBuild program, youth spend half of their time learning construction trade skills by building or rehabilitating housing for low-income people; the other half of their time is spent in a YouthBuild classroom earning a high school diploma or equivalency degree. Personal counseling and training in life skills and financial management are provided. The students are part of a mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success and to improving the conditions in their neighborhoods (Leslie, 2007, p. 8).

YB USA is a national nonprofit organization founded in 1990. The national office supports a local network of the YB programs. Since 1994, more than 76,000 young people have been served by the program, and they have helped create more than 17,000 units of affordable housing. There have been several prior studies on the YB students, with a recent effort reporting on a survey of several thousand YB graduates from 73 sites and including interviews with 57 randomly selected graduates from 8 sites (Hahn, Leavitt, Horvat, & Davis, 2004). The written survey yielded a 22.3% response rate and reportedly found considerable self-reported success among the 882 respondents. For example, 59.2% reported having a general equivalency diploma (GED) or high school diploma following the YB program, compared to 21.7% who reported coming into the program with a degree. Self-reported use of illegal drugs dropped considerably, as did the recidivism rate. Of course, this is a highly selected sample as one would expect the “failures” from the program to be more likely to fail to respond to the follow-up survey or to not be located by survey researchers during the follow-up period. Nevertheless, the findings were consistent with the randomly drawn smaller sample of detailed interviews.

Recently, Leslie (2007) reported on the first wave of the YB USA Offender Project (the subject of the current study) and compared outcomes to short-term program targets. For example, Leslie reported a high school or GED completion rate of 150 of 388, or 38.5%, compared to a target rate of 34.2% (115 of 325 targeted for entry). Wages were reportedly US\$8.94/hr compared to a target of US\$8.00, and recidivism was estimated to be 25% compared to a target of only 15%. Although useful as a measure of outcome, Leslie's study does not compare these outcomes to what might have been expected of this population in the absence of the YB program and thus is limited in its ability to assess program effectiveness.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2007) recently issued a report noting the lack of consistently recorded data on the YB program and thus the inability to track the performance outcomes of the YB graduates. Although the YB programs routinely collect data on attendance, completion, high school and GED acquisition, and job placement throughout the program, the follow-up data on how the YB graduates fare post graduation is scant. Although graduates are supposed to be followed at 6, 12, and 24 months post graduation, data collection is limited. For example, the only recidivism measure is whether the individual was in jail at the time of a regularly scheduled follow-up survey. Even then, only a small fraction of program graduates are followed up systematically and thus even the data that are collected are subject to selectivity bias. Furthermore, only graduates are surveyed, so it is unknown what happened with those who dropped out of the program due to reasons including violation of rules (i.e., drug use, disruption) and/or employment, relocation, and pregnancy. The data used in the current study focus on a specific YB project where data have been rigorously collected every quarter for both graduates and dropouts—the YB USA Offender Project, which is described next.

### **The YB USA Offender Project**

In 2004, YB USA was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to identify and grant money to local programs to add program participants under an incarcerated youth reentry program. To be eligible, program participants had to “fit into one or more of three categories” (Leslie, 2007, p. 18): (a) young people who have been referred by the courts to YB as a diversion program to avoid incarceration, including those on probation or (b) young people, having served time in prison or jail, referred by the criminal justice system to YB in a coordinated reentry process, including those on parole or (c) young people who find their own way to YB—having been convicted of a crime and served time in prison or jail previously—who still need education or job-training opportunities. YB USA subsequently awarded grants to 30 local YB program sites “according to the following DOL-established criteria” (Leslie, 2007, p. 15): (a) performance: site demonstrates successful outcomes and operates high-quality programs and services; (b) community linkages: site demonstrates effective partnership building, is supported within the community, and is viewed as a community resource; (c) outreach and recruitment capacity: site demonstrates an ability to reach the intended target population; and (d) leadership: site demonstrates the ability to mobilize resources and staff and can quickly and effectively operationalize grant components.

The 30 sites that were chosen include both urban and rural areas as well as a wide geographic dispersion. Of course, the selection criteria ensure that the programs evaluated in the current study are not randomly chosen and instead are among the best YB sites. Thus, while it might not be appropriate to “scale up” any program outcome findings, it would be appropriate to identify these outcomes as representative of what a well-run local YB site can hope to achieve. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that by design, all the YB offender participants have criminal records—whereas not all the YB program participants have prior records. By design, participants in the Offender Project are mixed with other YB students and in general, offenders are integrated with nonoffenders to avoid a segregated environment and to avoid creating a negative incentive among the youth who want to enter the YB.

### **Current Focus**

This study conducts a preliminary outcome evaluation of the YB USA Offender Project—a targeted intervention focusing on 16 to 24-year-old offenders, that is organized around employment (within the context of building/rehabilitating housing) and educational training, two programmatic efforts that have been generally shown to have some—albeit modest—success at preventing crime

**Table 1.** Characteristics of YouthBuild Offender Project Graduates and Dropouts at Time of Entry

	Total	YB graduate	YB dropout	Sample sizes (graduate/ dropouts/total)	p value
<b>Demographics</b>					
Age	19.62	19.50	19.90	166/99/265	.18
Male	0.85	0.85	0.85	272/116/388	.92
Non-White	0.76	0.78	0.72	272/116/388	.24
Married	0.02	0.01	0.03	272/116/388	.45
High school or GED at entry	0.11	0.12	0.11	272/116/388	.96
High school at entry	0.06	0.07	0.05	272/116/388	.59
GED at entry	0.05	0.05	0.06	272/116/388	.61
Household income	US\$8,784	US\$9,573	US\$7,023	199/89/288	.03
Working at entry	0.09	0.09	0.10	272/116/388	.64
<b>Prior record</b>					
Prior arrest	0.97	0.96	0.99	268/111/379	.11
Prior misdemeanor	0.70	0.69	0.73	226/96/322	.44
Prior felony	0.46	0.42	0.57	232/97/329	.02
Served time in juvenile detention	0.60	0.57	0.68	272/116/388	.04
Served time in adult correctional facility	0.40	0.36	0.48	271/116/387	.03
Intensive aftercare program at time of entry	0.33	0.30	0.40	271/116/387	.05
Substance abuse problem at time of entry	0.41	0.42	0.37	170/68/238	.43
Undergoing substance abuse treatment at time of entry	0.14	0.13	0.17	163/65/228	.51
<b>Living situation</b>					
Living in group home	0.02	0.01	0.02	272/116/388	.85
Living in halfway house	0.03	0.01	0.06	272/116/388	.01
Homeless	0.03	0.02	0.05	272/116/388	.07
Living in public housing	0.10	0.09	0.12	272/116/388	.33
Foster child	0.04	0.04	0.04	272/116/388	.90
Student on public assistance	0.28	0.28	0.28	272/116/388	.98
Family on public assistance	0.32	0.30	0.34	272/115/387	.51
Lives with parents	0.63	0.67	0.53	272/116/388	.01
Lives by self	0.10	0.08	0.15	272/116/388	.07

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; YB = YouthBuild.

(Sherman et al., 2002). The analysis of program outcomes includes both recidivism and education attainment for both the YB graduates and dropouts. Findings suggest reduced recidivism and improved educational outcomes. The article closes with a summary of the research findings, cautionary statements, and suggestions for future research.

## Data and Methods

Data were collected from 388 individuals participating in the larger YB Offender Project from the fourth quarter of 2004 through the second quarter of 2007. Table 1 compares the demographic characteristics, employment history, criminal background, and living situation at the time of entry into the YB program. A comparison between those who ultimately graduated from the program to those who dropped out is presented. Although these two groups are very similar in background, there are some important differences that unfortunately preclude any definitive statement regarding the effectiveness of the YB program in influencing recidivism and educational outcomes.

Characteristics that are similar (i.e., not statistically significant) include average age at entry (19.5 for the YB graduates vs. 19.9 for dropouts),<sup>1</sup> male (85% for both), non-Whites (78% for graduates vs. 72% for dropouts), married (1% for graduates vs. 3% for dropouts), and high school or GED degree at entry (11% for both).

Other variables differ significantly. For example, the YB graduates come from a higher income household (US\$9,573 vs. US\$7,023). Unsurprisingly, dropouts have worse criminal records than do graduates: while 42% of graduates enter with a prior felony conviction, the felony conviction rate for dropouts is 57%. Similarly, 57% of graduates and 68% of dropouts served time in a juvenile detention center and dropouts also were more likely to have served time in an adult correctional facility (48% vs. 36%). Finally, the living situation of the YB students at the time of entry also varies by graduation status: 2% of graduates were homeless, compared to 5% of dropouts; 1% of graduates lived in a halfway house, compared to 6% of dropouts; and while 67% of graduates lived with their parents, only 53% of the dropouts did as well.

## Outcome Measures

Table 2 reports on several outcome measures that are available on a consistent basis—including a comparison of the YB graduates and dropouts. First, note that the data are collected and reported on a quarterly basis. On average, data are available for 10.3 quarters (about 31 months)—10.4 quarters for graduates and 10.0 quarters for dropouts ( $p < .05$ ). While the average student spends 3.6 quarters (10.8 months) in the YB program, graduates spend on average 4.0 quarters (12 months) compared to only 2.4 quarters (7.2 months) for dropouts ( $p < .05$ ).

Excluding those who enter with a high school diploma or GED, 46% of the YB participants obtain a degree or GED within the time period being measured. YB graduates are significantly more likely to graduate from high school or obtain a GED compared to the YB dropouts (58% vs. 18%). Note that this comparison excludes the 11% of the YB students who enter with a high school degree or GED.

Overall, the YB graduates also have lower criminal offending rates. First, information is presented on the percentage of students who have at least one “failure” (i.e., convicted or incarcerated for a new crime or have their parole revoked from a previous offense) within the approximately 10 reporting quarters. Of those who graduate from the YB, 11% are convicted of a crime but not incarcerated, compared to 14% of those who drop out ( $p > .05$ ). Significant differences are found for the fraction of students who are convicted of crimes in which some time is served (15% for graduates vs. 27% for dropouts) and the fraction whose parole is revoked (13% vs. 29%). Combined, 28% of the YB graduates and 44% of dropouts have at least one of these three “failures” during the 10 quarters.

It is possible that the reason students drop out of the YB is the fact that they are convicted of a crime or their parole is revoked. Thus, in the next set of comparisons, only failures that occurred in quarters after the student leaves the YB program (either through graduation or dropping out) are counted. Virtually identical results are uncovered: while 17% of the YB graduates have no violation after their graduation, 33% of the YB dropouts have a violation following their leaving the program ( $p < .05$ ).

Finally, when offending rates by quarter (instead of by student) are assessed, similar results emerge. Although this approach is probably a more accurate reflection of offending rates, there are some measurement concerns. Although the data are supposed to reflect whether a new conviction occurred during that quarter, for example, in some cases “new” convictions with incarceration occur in consecutive quarters. It is possible that this really reflects one conviction with a period of incarceration spanning several quarters. Still, when the percentage of quarters in which a violation is reported is calculated, results are very similar to those based on the student-by-student measurement.

**Table 2.** Program Outcomes for YouthBuild Offender Project Graduates and Dropouts

	Total	YB graduates	YB dropouts	Sample sizes (graduates/dropouts/total)	<i>p</i> value
Number of quarters in program	3.6	4.0	2.4	258/106/364	.00
Number of quarters after program	6.8	6.4	7.6	258/106/364	.00
Total number of quarters	10.3	10.4	10.0	272/116/388	.00
High school/GED after program entry (only those who entered without degree, <i>n</i> = 345)	0.46	0.58	0.18	242/103/345	.00
High school after program entry ( <i>n</i> = 345)	0.19	0.24	0.05	242/103/345	.00
GED after program entry ( <i>n</i> = 345)	0.28	0.34	0.14	242/103/345	.00
Percentage of students (a) after entry					
Convicted of crime	0.12	0.11	0.14	272/116/388	.44
Incarcerated	0.18	0.15	0.27	272/116/388	.00
Parole revocation	0.18	0.13	0.29	272/116/388	.00
Any of the above	0.33	0.28	0.44	272/116/388	.00
Percentage of students (b) after departure					
Convicted of crime	0.06	0.05	0.09	263/108/371	.16
Incarcerated	0.13	0.09	0.21	263/108/371	.00
Parole revocation	0.12	0.08	0.20	263/108/371	.00
Any of the above	0.21	0.17	0.33	263/108/371	.00
Percentage of quarters (a) after entry					
Convicted of crime	0.02	0.01	0.02	272/116/388	.28
Incarcerated	0.03	0.02	0.05	272/116/388	.00
Parole revocation	0.03	0.02	0.05	272/116/388	.00
Any of the above	0.08	0.06	0.12	272/116/388	.00
Percentage of quarters (b) after departure					
Convicted of crime	0.01	0.01	0.02	253/106/359	.12
Incarcerated	0.03	0.02	0.05	253/106/359	.02
Parole revocation	0.03	0.02	0.04	253/106/359	.01
Any of the above	0.07	0.05	0.11	253/106/359	.00

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; YB = YouthBuild.

Convictions and incarcerations are only counted if the offense occurred subsequent to program entry. Parole revocations are for incidents that occur after entry—even if the underlying crime was committed prior to entry.

Table 3 compares program outcomes by location. There were 30 sites in 29 cities (with St. Louis having two different sites). Program participation ranged from 8 to 24 students per site. YB graduation rates ranged from a low of 29% in Kincaid, West Virginia, to 100% in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Springfield, Massachusetts. Similarly, high school or GED completion rates (for those who entered the program without a degree) ranged from a low of 0% in Kincaid, West Virginia, to 100% in Philadelphia. Because the sample sizes are relatively small within each site, it is inappropriate to draw any definitive conclusions about success rates across locations; however, it appears that outcomes vary considerably across sites. For example, on comparing two sites with a large number of participants, New Waverly, Texas (*n* = 24) and Richmond, California (*n* = 18), the results show that New Waverly had a higher YB graduation rates (79% vs. 67% respectively), however, New Waverly had a lower high school/GED graduation rate (45% vs. 61%) and a higher recidivism rate both throughout the program (33% vs. 22%) and after program departure (29% vs. 6%). Note that New Waverly is unique among the 30 sites, as it takes place at a residential correctional facility—and thus offenders and nonoffenders are not integrated into the program. Due to small sample sizes, the only significant comparison between New Waverly and Richmond is the post-YB recidivism rate. Taken

**Table 3.** YouthBuild Offender Project Outcomes by Location

City	N	YB graduation	Any violation post entry	Any violation post departure	High school or GED for those entering without degree	
					N	Mean
Albany, New York	11	0.73	0.00	0.00	11	0.18
Bemidji, Minnesota	11	0.55	0.73	0.64	10	0.70
Bloomington, Illinois	8	0.88	0.38	0.13	4	0.75
Brockton, Massachusetts	11	0.82	0.09	0.00	9	0.56
Brownsville, Texas	9	0.56	0.33	0.22	9	0.44
Chula Vista, California	11	0.64	0.18	0.18	11	0.27
Columbus, Ohio	15	0.87	0.27	0.13	15	0.20
Flushing, New York	15	0.67	0.53	0.13	13	0.38
Fresno, California	16	0.44	0.50	0.38	11	0.09
Gardena, California	16	0.56	0.50	0.50	15	0.67
Honolulu, Hawaii	8	0.75	0.25	0.13	8	0.50
Kincaid, West Virginia	14	0.29	0.29	0.00	8	0.00
Lebanon, Oregon	8	0.63	0.38	0.38	8	0.75
Los Angeles, California	15	1.00	0.27	0.13	14	0.57
Madison, Wisconsin	12	0.67	0.33	0.17	8	0.63
New Waverly, Texas	24	0.79	0.33	0.29	22	0.45
New York, New York	12	0.58	0.25	0.25	10	0.40
Newark, New Jersey	19	0.74	0.32	0.11	19	0.37
Petersburg, Virginia	11	0.82	0.18	0.09	11	0.36
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	10	1.00	0.30	0.30	10	1.00
Portland, Maine	10	0.70	0.30	0.30	10	0.40
Portland, Oregon	15	0.80	0.13	0.13	15	0.67
Richmond, California	18	0.67	0.22	0.06	18	0.61
Rockford, Illinois	11	0.64	0.27	0.18	11	0.36
Roxbury, Massachusetts	17	0.53	0.35	0.12	15	0.33
Springfield, Massachusetts	9	1.00	0.33	0.33	8	0.63
St. Louis, Missouri (a)	15	0.67	0.80	0.47	15	0.40
St. Louis, Missouri (b)	12	0.83	0.33	0.17	8	0.38
Trenton, New Jersey	14	0.79	0.29	0.21	11	0.64
Waukegan, Illinois	11	0.64	0.27	0.18	8	0.38
Total	388	0.70	0.33	0.21	345	0.46

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; YB = YouthBuild.

as a whole, however, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test rejects the hypothesis that each outcome measure is identical across cities.

Table 4 compares program outcomes by site characteristics. First, a comparison of urban to rural is conducted. Note that some sites were identified as being “part rural” and these have been recoded as “urban,” as they appeared closer to the urban category in terms of outcomes. YB graduation rates are somewhat (but not significantly) higher in urban areas (72% vs. 60%); however, there is no significant difference between high school and GED rates between urban (46%) and rural (48%) sites. Program participants in rural sites are also more (but not significantly so) likely to recidivate (40% vs. 32% at any time following entry into the YB and 30% vs. 19% after program departure). Outcomes based on site participation in three grant programs run by the YB USA with local YB programs—the National Schools Initiative (NSI), Americorps National Direct (which provides funding and personnel for local YB programs), and Americorps Education Award (which provides scholarship money to participants who fulfill their service hours)—are also compared. The NSI sites

**Table 4.** YouthBuild Offender Project Outcomes by Site Characteristics

Site characteristic (number of participants)	YB graduates	High school or GED (number in parentheses)	High school (number in parentheses)	GED (number in parentheses)	Percentage of students with any violation after entry	Percentage of students with any violation after departure
Urban <sup>a</sup> (303)	0.72	0.46 (273)	0.21 (273)	0.26 (273)	0.32	0.19
Rural (85)	0.60	0.48 (72)	0.10 (72)	0.38 (72)	0.40	0.30
<i>p</i> value	.085	.785	.030	.047	.202	.072
National Schools Initiative						
Yes (150)	0.69	0.56 (132)	0.39 (132)	0.17 (132)	0.35	0.25
No (238)	0.71	0.40 (213)	0.06 (213)	0.35 (213)	0.32	0.18
<i>p</i> value	.625	.003	.000	.0005	.578	.145
Americorps National Direct						
Yes (138)	0.67	0.49 (118)	0.11 (118)	0.38 (118)	0.35	0.23
No (250)	0.72	0.44 (227)	0.22 (227)	0.23 (227)	0.32	0.20
<i>p</i> value	.273	.412	.009	.003	.578	.406
Americorps Education Award						
Yes (109)	0.75	0.46 (97)	0.26 (97)	0.21 (97)	0.30	0.20
No (279)	0.68	0.46 (248)	0.16 (248)	0.31 (248)	0.34	0.21
<i>p</i> value	.169	.944	.031	.053	.709	.209

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; YB = YouthBuild.

<sup>a</sup> Includes some sites that are listed as "part rural."

have received grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and "have evolved into diploma-granting schools chartered by states or certified as alternative schools by local superintendents."<sup>2</sup> In the sample participating in this program, these are the only sites that are able to grant high school diplomas themselves.

As shown in Table 4, NSI sites have a significantly higher high school/GED graduation rate (56% vs. 40%). Not surprisingly, the difference is even more striking when looking at GED and high school graduation rates separately: 39% of program participants in NSI sites ultimately graduated high school compared to only 6% of participants at non-NSI sites. However, while 17% of participants at NSI sites received a GED, 35% of those who were at non-NSI sites were awarded a GED. While NSI participants also have a lower recidivism rate, these differences are not significant. The other two (Americorps) grant programs provide funding and/or personnel to local sites but do not involve program development.<sup>3</sup> No significant differences in program outcomes emerge for those receiving funding under these latter two grant programs.

Although the univariate comparisons suggest that YB graduates have significantly better outcomes than those who drop out, this does not necessarily mean that the outcomes can be attributed to the program itself. Table 5 attempts to control for some of the other factors that might contribute to favorable outcomes. Based on data availability, controls were possible for preentry criminal record, educational and work status, living situation, a few demographic characteristics, as well as program characteristics such as the number of years the site had been a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-sponsored program, urban/rural, and the NSI.

The first column reports on a probit regression equation where the dependent variable is whether the participant ultimately graduated from the YB. Participants who previously served time—either in a juvenile detention or adult correctional facility—were less likely to successfully graduate from the program. Aside from these two variables, the only variable that approaches significance is "urban program" that evinces a higher YB graduation rate.



**Table 5.** Probit Regression Analysis of YouthBuild Offender Project Outcomes

	Graduate from YB		Any violation post entry		High school or GED graduate		High school graduate	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value
YB graduate	–	–	–0.37	.014	1.22	.000	1.38	.000
Student characteristics								
Prior juvenile detention	–0.28	.062	–0.07	.655	0.05	.725	0.23	.246
Prior adult corrections	–0.36	.014	0.30	.050	–0.10	.535	0.03	.882
Incarcerated at entry	–0.40	.429	0.63	.245	0.85	.202	– <sup>a</sup>	–
High school or GED at entry	0.11	.617	0.34	.114	–	–	–	–
Working prior to entry	0.04	.859	–0.12	.633	–0.04	.878	0.36	.162
Student on public assistance	0.10	.633	0.14	.369	0.001	.995	–0.07	.758
Living with parents	0.12	.475	0.20	.248	0.03	.853	0.99	.000
Living by self	–0.20	.446	–0.04	.864	0.43	.157	0.99	.001
Living in halfway house	–0.64	.189	0.42	.259	–0.37	.558	– <sup>a</sup>	–
Male	0.05	.820	0.61	.003	0.03	.897	–0.44	.071
Non-White	0.02	.884	0.16	.370	0.03	.860	0.07	.795
Married	–0.26	.569	–0.01	.983	0.56	.271	1.33	.014
Program Characteristics								
Years of HUD funding	0.15	.503	–0.02	.297	–0.01	.752	0.05	.086
National Schools Initiative	–0.05	.721	0.11	.437	0.62	.000	1.63	.000
Urban	0.40	.087	–0.47	.043	–0.24	.262	–0.03	.904
Constant	0.33	.191	–0.66	.054	–1.12	.002	–3.82	.000
Number of observations		387		387		344		344
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		.051		.070		.144		.357

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; HUD = Department of Housing and Urban Development; YB = YouthBuild.

<sup>a</sup> Dropped from regression as these variables perfectly predict the dependent variable.

The second probit regression estimates the probability of any criminal violation (conviction, incarceration, or parole violation) per quarter. Graduating from the YB is negatively and significantly associated with recidivism, while males and participants with a prior adult corrections history have a significantly higher recidivism rate. Males have about a 61% higher recidivism rate and having a prior adult correctional history increases the probability of recidivism by about 30%.

The third column estimates the probability of high school graduation or GED (for those who entered the program without a degree). Once again, the YB graduation is significant. The only other significant variable is the NSI program variable, which is also positive, indicating that NSI sites have a higher probability of high school graduation or GED. Finally, the last column repeats this analysis but instead measures the probability of high school graduation (excluding those who obtain only a GED). The basic result is similar—the YB graduation is significant. The only other variables that are now significant, which positively affect high school graduation rates are being married, living with parents, or living by oneself, and the NSI program variable.

Although Table 5 is consistent with earlier findings and suggests that graduation from the YB program yields positive outcomes, the results cannot be definitively attributed to the program due to sample selection concerns. For example, participants who drop out of the YB may also be those who would otherwise have high recidivism rates and be less likely to graduate from high school. To

**Table 6.** Treatment Effect Model on YouthBuild Offender Project Outcomes—Stage 1: Probability of Graduating from YouthBuild

	Coefficient	p value
Prior juvenile detention	−0.32	.025
Prior adult corrections	−0.34	.015
Incarcerated at entry	−0.33	.516
High school or GED at entry	0.07	.767
Working prior to entry	0.004	.984
Student on public assistance	0.03	.865
Living with parents	0.19	.233
Living by self	−0.23	.339
Living in halfway house	−0.52	.200
Constant	0.79	.000
Number of observations		387
Pseudo $R^2$		.042

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma.

**Table 7.** Treatment Effect Model on YouthBuild Offender Project Outcomes—Stage 2: Outcome from YouthBuild Program

	Dependent variable: high school or GED graduate		Dependent variable: high school graduate		Dependent variable: any violation post entry/quarters	
	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value	$\beta$	p value
Estimated YB graduate	−0.29	.679	0.45	.640	−0.52	.411
YB graduate	1.20	.000	1.25	.000	−0.37	.013
Male	−0.04	.830	−0.39	.094	0.61	.003
Non-White	0.02	.939	0.08	.751	0.23	.198
Married	0.60	.247	1.28	.048	−0.15	.791
Years of HUD funding	−0.01	.671	0.03	.319	−0.04	.077
National Schools Initiative	0.56	.000	1.52	.000	0.13	.353
Urban	−0.31	.177	0.11	.703	−0.36	.086
Constant	−0.66	.246	−3.03	.000	−0.09	.863
N		344		344		387
Pseudo $R^2$		.134		.3039		.048

NOTE: GED = general equivalency diploma; HUD = Department of Housing and Urban Development; YB = YouthBuild.

control for absence of this possibility, a randomized design, a “treatment effects” model (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983), is adopted, where participants are assigned to either a treatment (YB graduate) or control (YB dropout) group. This is modeled as a two-stage process, where the probability of a participant graduating from the YB is first estimated, and in the second stage, this selection bias is controlled for, which then permits an estimate of the effect of the treatment (YB graduation) itself.

Tables 6 and 7 report the findings from the treatment effects model. Stage 1 estimates the probability that the participant graduated from the YB program (Table 6). In this equation, variables from Table 5, which are participant-specific and not fixed demographic characteristics, are used. As

shown, the most important explanatory variables are prior criminal history—in particular, spending time in either a juvenile detention center or adult prison lowers the probability of graduating from the program by about one third. Controls for high school diploma or GED at entry, working prior to entry, and living arrangements do not yield any significant effects.

Stage 2 of the treatment effects model examines program outcomes (Table 7). First, the dependent variable is high school or GED graduation. Because this is only estimated for those who enter the YB without a degree, it reduces the sample size to 343. The main finding is that controlling for the estimated YB graduation probability, the graduation coefficient is +1.20 and significant. Thus, the YB graduates are more likely to graduate with a high school degree or GED. The only other significant variable is the NSI indicator, which is positively related to high school or GED completion. The second column repeats the analysis—with virtually identical results—restricting the outcome variable to high school graduation (i.e., excluding GED).

The third regression estimates the fraction of quarters in which any criminal or parole violation occurs. Again, controlling for the estimated YB graduation rate, results indicate that graduating from the YB program significantly reduces the probability of a violation.<sup>4</sup> Although not reported, similar regression models were estimated, which included all variables in the first stage and only included the new “estimated graduation rate” and the actual graduation variable in the second stage. Dummy variables for each site in the first stage were also included. In all cases, the coefficient on YB graduation is significant. The results were also replicated including an age variable for those cases where estimates of the participant’s age are available: graduating from the YB Offender Project significantly reduced the probability of recidivism.

## Conclusion

The delinquency literature is filled with examples of many programs aimed at turning juveniles away from a life of crime and on a pathway toward prosocial behavior across many domains over the life course (Farrington & Welsh, 2006). Unfortunately, a great many of these efforts have not been empirically evaluated, and of those that have been evaluated, successful efforts have been uncommon, with programs rarely exerting a deterrent effect on crime and/or a positive effect across noncrime domains (Greenwood, 2006). This article conducted an initial, preliminary outcome evaluation regarding several crime and noncrime outcomes among graduates and dropouts from the YB Offender Project, a comprehensive intervention program targeting low-income young adults. Such a preliminary outcome evaluation regarding the effectiveness of the YB graduation to reduce crime and/or increase education attainment was viewed as important because there currently exist no such information. Two key findings emerged from the analysis. First, the YB Offender Project graduates were more likely to graduate from high school or obtain a GED when compared to dropouts from the program. Second, overall, the YB Offender Project graduates evinced lower offending rates than those who dropped out of the program.

Although evidence supporting the YB program emerged, several limitations preclude definitive statements. First, the YB sample had a short-term follow-up period—about 18 months after completion of the program. It is possible that after a period of time, the short-term deterrent effects observed with respect to crime could dwindle. Additionally, it is unknown whether the YB graduates will, in fact, continue being productive members of society with respect to other noncrime outcomes (employment, relationships, etc.). Moreover, a recent study of the older YB graduates finds significant evidence of a long-term positive outcome for many participants (Hahn et al., 2004). Second, this study examined 30 YB sites that were chosen based on criteria that may have favored a successful outcome because of an a priori assessment by the national YB office that these local sites were well operated and fulfilled their (and DOL’s) criteria for a likely successful outcome. Thus, the findings should be considered an assessment of well-designed and operated YB programs and may

not be generalizable to all YB programs and sites. At the same time, a more limited analysis (due to data availability) of a random sample of all YB participants suggests that the finding of a high graduation rate and low recidivism is likely to carry over to the program as a whole—although it is difficult to quantify this effect. Third, the positive outcomes obtained in this study cannot be attributed to the YB itself because it is unknown whether the positive outcomes are the result of the YB program as a whole or some of its specific parts or whether participants would have had similar outcomes in the absence of program participation. Although strong statistical techniques were used in our assessment of the YB program, it is possible that program participants were highly motivated individuals who would have otherwise been successful. Ideally, potential participants would be randomly assigned to a treatment and control group so that outcomes could be rigorously compared. As an anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out, the comparison of program graduates to program dropouts is not the ideal methodological design within which to answer questions of impact and causality. Thus, we must appropriately qualify our findings as an initial, preliminary outcome evaluation of the YB Offender Project and hope that it spurs the implementation of a more rigorous, experimental design to better evaluate the YB effort.

With these caveats in hand, the preliminary findings offer the YB Offender Project as a potentially effective approach at reducing recidivism and improving educational outcomes. Going forward, it will be important to conduct a more rigorous, experimental study of the YB program and its specific components and to expand the range of noncrime outcomes in an effort to document the reach of the YB program.

### Notes

1. Although the sample size in the current study is 388, most but not all variables are available for the entire sample. For example, data on date of birth are only available for 265 students.
2. See [http://www.youthbuild.org/site/c.htIRI3PIKoG/b.2440391/k.4109/National\\_Schools\\_Initiative\\_Network.htm](http://www.youthbuild.org/site/c.htIRI3PIKoG/b.2440391/k.4109/National_Schools_Initiative_Network.htm) and <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/TransformingHighSchools/Schools/ModelSchools/>.
3. See [http://www.youthbuild.org/site/c.htIRI3PIKoG/b.1267789/k.93F8/Grants\\_and\\_Loans.htm](http://www.youthbuild.org/site/c.htIRI3PIKoG/b.1267789/k.93F8/Grants_and_Loans.htm).
4. Similar results emerge when measuring the dependent variable based only on postdeparture from the YB program.

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