

BRIGHT FUTURES

2018



program evaluation conducted
by the Augustana Research Institute

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Bright Futures program, which was conducted from November 2017 through April 2018 by the Augustana Research Institute (ARI). Bright Futures is a transitional housing program for homeless families with children, a joint effort of Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership (ICAP), Sioux Falls Community Development (City of Sioux Falls), and the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission. This evaluation was commissioned by Sioux Falls Community Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to 2011, the City of Sioux Falls Community Development Department (SFCD) had provided rental assistance dollars for homeless people through Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission. However, in the spring of 2011, the need for additional transitional housing services to assist homeless families with children became evident. Heartland House, Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership's (ICAP) existing homeless program in Sioux Falls, was full with a long waiting list. This dilemma was high on the list of concerns for both SFCD and ICAP.

At that time, it was also felt that rental assistance should include required case management in an effort to lead households to economic self-sufficiency rather than solely providing housing assistance. With this in mind, the City approached ICAP about partnering to develop a program with Heartland House as its model.

The goal of the program would be to empower the households receiving rental assistance to progress through a detailed self-sufficiency plan and to make measurable strides toward financial independence. This helping hand to households in need of assistance would come with the expectation that they utilize the opportunity to address and improve their life skills, secure employment, and become as independent of government assistance as possible.

After several conversations, a partnership evolved between these two organizations, and the Bright Futures program was born. The program would include intensive case management and protective payee services when needed, rental assistance and required attendance by participants in tenant education and parenting classes. Also, a damage and/or rent guarantee for landlords would be available as needed. Bright Futures would serve homeless and nearly homeless families with children.

Initially, 24 families were served. A few years later, 12 families were added and then another 12. At this time, 42 families are being served at any one time. Early on in the development of this program, SFCD and ICAP realized the need for other local expertise, and Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment was asked to administer the rental assistance portion of the program. Another local organization, Sioux Empire Housing Partnership, is currently providing the tenant education classes.

In the fall of 2017, discussion took place between SFCD and ICAP regarding the need for an evaluation of the results of the program over its six year life. With that in mind, proposals were solicited from South Dakota higher education institutions. The proposal from the Augustana Research Institute was selected, and during the winter of 2017-2018, a comprehensive analysis of the program and client outcomes was undertaken. What follows is an Executive Summary of the results of that work along with a detailed description of the results of the Bright Futures program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bright Futures gives participants an equal chance of success. There is no significant association between Bright Futures program outcome and race, gender, age at enrollment, marital status at enrollment, or household size, which means participants enter with an equal chance of success regardless of these background characteristics.

Bright Futures increases employment. From the time they entered the program to the time they left, 97% of Bright Futures graduates gained employment or remained employed. At follow-up, 88% were still employed. Overall, 67% of Bright Futures participants gain or maintain employment during the program, compared to 36% of a comparison group. The odds of a Bright Futures participant being employed at exit are 3.6 times the odds of a comparison group member being employed at exit. The odds of a Bright Futures *graduate* being employed at exit are 50.4 times the odds of a comparison group member being employed at exit.

Bright Futures increases earnings from wages. From entry to exit, participants see an average increase of \$3,571 in annual earnings from wages, an increase of about 36% from wages at entry. Successful graduates see an average increase of \$9,699, an increase of about 76% from their wages at entry. During the same time period, comparison group members saw no significant change in their earnings.

Bright Futures reduces reliance on cash benefits. For graduates surveyed, average cash benefits (other than rental assistance) at entry totaled \$466/month. At follow up, average cash benefits for graduates was reduced to \$287/month. Of graduates who were surveyed, 5 of 7 (with 1 unknown) received SNAP at entry with an average SNAP benefit of \$405/month. At follow up, 5 of 8 still received SNAP, but the average monthly SNAP benefit was reduced to \$287.

Bright Futures reduces reliance on rental assistance. On average, Bright Futures participants reduced their level of rental assistance by \$58.59 per month (\$703.08 annually)—a reduction, as a percentage of rent, of 8.9 percentage points. Successful graduates reduced theirs by an average of \$151.59 per month (\$1,819.08 annually)—a reduction, as a percentage of rent, of 24.6 percentage points (from about two-thirds to less than half of rent). In a follow-up survey, three-fourths of successful graduates reported paying for housing without assistance, including one-fourth who reported owning their own homes.

Bright Futures increases material wellbeing, net of reductions in rental assistance. Even after accounting for reductions in benefits due to increased earnings, participants leave the program materially better off. Overall, Bright Futures participants see an average increase in income of \$2,974—even after accounting for changes in rental assistance. Successful graduates see an even larger increase in total income accounting for rental assistance, an average increase of \$8,423 annually.

- As an additional measure of increased material wellbeing, successful graduates were significantly less likely to experience food insecurity compared to current participants. In a survey, just 1 of 8 graduates reported some level of food insecurity, compared to 11 of 17 current participants.

Bright Futures' benefits increase with exposure to the program. Intensity and duration of program participation are associated with positive outcomes, suggesting that Bright Futures does, in fact, influence outcomes. In particular, participants who complete more coach visits and more classes go on to graduate more often. They are also more likely to be employed at exit and to see increases in annual earnings and decreases in levels of rental assistance.

Bright Futures not only provides housing; it stabilizes lives and equips participants with life skills. Bright Futures functions effectively as a stabilization program, improving housing and employment stability by equipping participants with important life skills. When describing program benefits, participants focus on money management, goal-setting, and moral support. These skills lay the groundwork for long-term success and life improvement. Although few participants earn education credentials while in the program, one-fourth of graduates surveyed for follow-up said they had returned to school for a degree.

Bright Futures yields a positive return on investment. Based on observed effects and historical expenditures, every dollar invested in Bright Futures yields an expected return of \$8.36. Compared to the cost of providing rental assistance alone, the additional investment in case management has an even higher rate of return. Every dollar invested in case management on top of rental assistance yields an expected return of \$14.01.

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1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Bright Futures is a Sioux Falls-based transitional housing program for homeless families that was launched in 2011. The program is intended to move homeless families toward self-sufficiency by providing tenant-based rental assistance and case management for up to two years in order to stabilize housing, employment, and finances. To be eligible for the program, prospective participants must (a) be homeless or in danger of becoming homeless; (b) have children; and (c) have the desire and ability to increase their financial self-sufficiency through employment and to enter and maintain permanent housing. The program currently has capacity to serve 39 families at a time.

Bright Futures is a collaborative effort among Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership (ICAP), Sioux Falls Community Development (City of Sioux Falls), and the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission with education provided by the Sioux Empire Housing Partnership. ICAP provides case management for participating families, the city provides funding for case management and tenant-based rental assistance, the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission administers tenant-based rental assistance, and the Sioux Empire Housing Partnership provides classes for participants.

The model below (Figure 1) depicts the program theory underlying Bright Futures.

As inputs, Bright Futures contributes tenant-based rental assistance from HOME funds. Because it is tenant-based, the assistance follows the tenant and can be used in any unit within the city limits of Sioux Falls, provided the unit meets HUD's housing quality standards.¹ Bright Futures also provides case management through ICAP's Minnehaha County office. At program entry, in order to help participants secure a lease, Bright Futures may provide funds for a security deposit or first month rent or may sign a rent or damage guarantee for a landlord.

As outputs, Bright Futures produces case manager visits, a rental lease, and a family self-sufficiency plan that identifies household needs and resources available to meet those needs.

The program's intended outcomes for participants are employment, financial self-sufficiency, and permanent housing.

Finally, Bright Futures' intended long-term impacts include reduced demand for subsidized housing and economic assistance, more people in the workforce, and improved child development outcomes.

¹ Compared to project-based transitional housing programs that require clients move into and out of the program location, scattered-site transitional housing programs like Bright Futures may be more attractive to clients and more effective because they reduce stigma and minimize disruption of support networks (Barrow and Zimmer 1999).

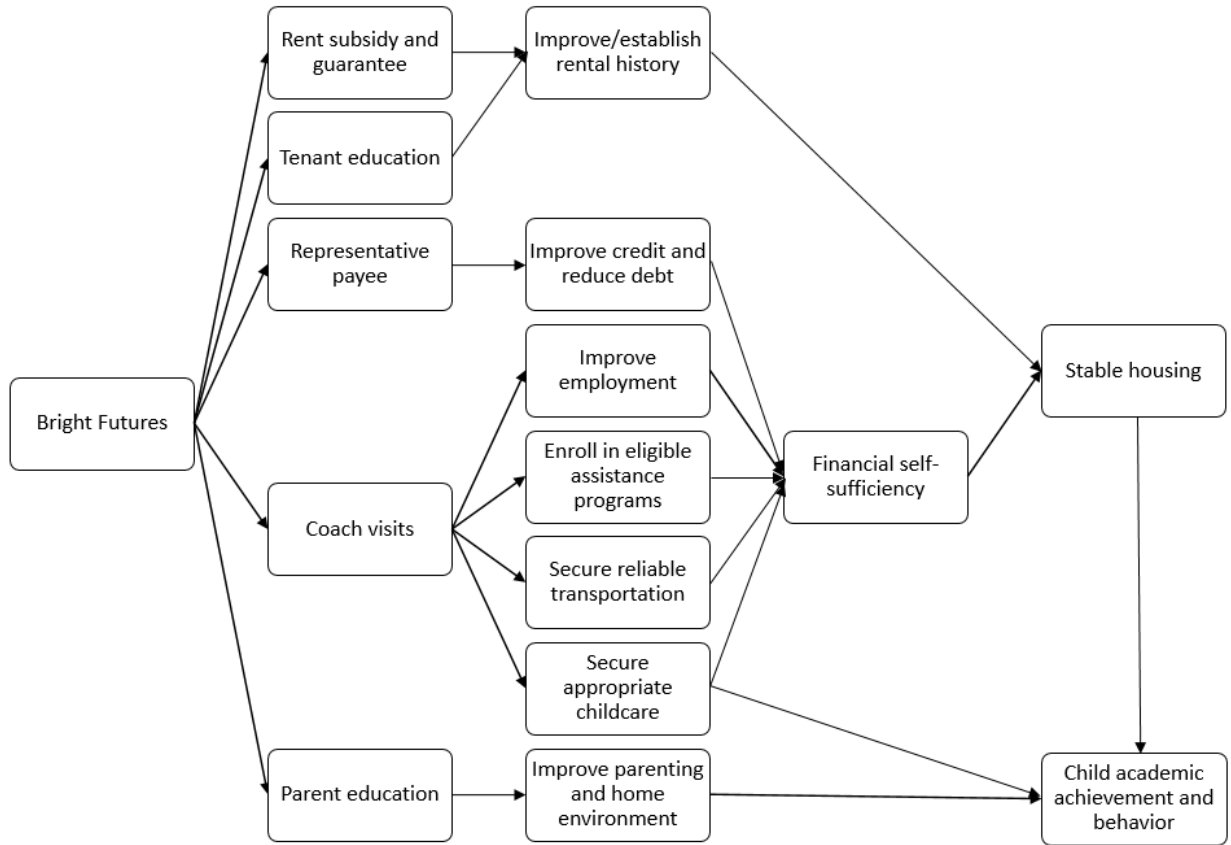


Figure 1. Bright Futures theory of action

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Bright Futures program. The purpose of this study is to measure whether the Bright Futures program successfully increases financial self-sufficiency and housing stability for those who participate and to identify ways in which the program could be improved. The study consists of retrospective review of participants' case notes to establish baseline outcome measures at entry and compare them to outcome measures at exit, a survey of current and past participants for feedback and follow-up, and comparison to a control group of similar households who received housing assistance without case management during the same time period.

The evaluation uses a pre-post study design; that is, it compares Bright Futures participants' statuses on key variables at entry (pre) and at exit (post) from the program. Data were collected by researchers who reviewed administrative records and case notes dating back to the program's beginning in 2011. Data collection took place from December 2017 through March 2018.

In addition to reviewing case notes, evaluators surveyed current and past Bright Futures participants. Surveys were administered in person and by phone. Survey respondents were asked about their experiences during and (for past participants) after leaving the Bright Futures program, including experiences with housing, homelessness, and eviction; financial situation, including employment, income, assistance, and transportation; and child care arrangements or child's or children's school attendance, achievement, and behavior.

This evaluation's retrospective, pre-post design provides a comprehensive review of program performance to date. The survey offers further insight into participants' experiences and perceptions of the program, as well as preliminary data on participants' long-term outcomes. In addition to evaluating program performance outcomes, this report makes recommendations for further data collection and follow-up for ongoing program monitoring and continuous quality improvement.

As with any retrospective evaluation, this report can make only limited causal inferences because estimates of program effects may be biased if they include confounding influences that occurred during the time period when participants were in the program or between exit from the program and follow-up. Macro-level changes in the local economy and political environment (e.g., recovery since the 2008 recession) as well as individual life-course changes (e.g., aging, childbirth, marriage or divorce, geographic mobility) may have influenced families' housing and financial status.

In order to strengthen the evaluation, a quasi-experimental comparison group was included to better estimate the counterfactual (i.e., what would have happened to Bright Futures participants had they not taken part in the program). If changes in participants' outcomes were wholly due to outside forces operating in the community at large, the comparison group should see changes similar to those observed among Bright Futures participants.

The comparison group was selected to be as similar to Bright Futures participants as possible using the following screening criteria: comparison group members are homeless families with children in which the head of household is able to work (i.e., is not disabled). However, the comparison group is not truly an experimental control in two senses. First, in a truly experimental design, households would be randomly assigned to treatment (Bright Futures participation) or control (the comparison group). Second, comparison group members would receive "usual care"—i.e., whatever programs and resources are available to homeless families in Sioux Falls, subject to all of the information barriers, waitlists, and eligibility restrictions that would face a typical homeless family in the community. Random assignment would require a prospective study and multiple years to complete an evaluation following group

assignment; further, random assignment may not be desirable in the case of social programs such as Bright Futures because it requires denying the program at random to some eligible families in order to create an experimental control group.

As an alternative, a quasi-experimental comparison group was drawn in a way that would ensure data had already been collected in the past at multiple points in time: comparison group members were selected from among recipients of Housing Choice Vouchers who met the screening criteria outlined in the previous paragraph and who received rental assistance between 2011 and present (i.e., concurrent with the Bright Futures program). The comparison group is quasi-experimental in that group members were not randomly assigned, which violates the experimental assumption that the Bright Futures and comparison groups would have been equivalent on outcomes absent the Bright Futures program. Additionally, the comparison group does not represent usual care absent Bright Futures; rather, the comparison group consists of households that received rental assistance without case management and without the two-year time limit that applies to Bright Futures rental assistance.²

This study was approved by the Augustana University IRB (FA17.04).

Bright Futures and Comparison Group

Records were examined for a total of 270 households who participated in Bright Futures between 2011 and 2017. Of those 270 households, 233 had known outcomes (i.e., program completion or termination), while 37 were current participants without recorded outcomes. From the 233 with known outcomes, 58 applied for the program and may have participated briefly in case management, but never received rental assistance. All but two of these 58 households were in the program for two months or less; 40 were in the program for one month or less. Those 58 households were considered not to have fully enrolled in Bright Futures and were not considered in the evaluation. That adjustment left the number of households that participated in Bright Futures at 212, including 175 households with known outcomes and 37 current participants.

The comparison group consists of 42 households that received a Housing Choice Voucher through the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission between 2011 and 2017, who were homeless and had children at the time they received the voucher, and whose head of household was able to work (i.e., not disabled). This last criterion (ability to work) was applied in order to make the comparison group comparable to Bright Futures participants, since Bright Futures requires participants be willing and able to work.

Unlike Bright Futures, where participation is limited to a maximum of two years, Housing Choice Vouchers do not have a time limit. Households can keep a voucher so long as they meet eligibility criteria (e.g., income). In order to compare pre and post scores for Bright Futures participants and the comparison group, an artificial “exit” date was constructed for comparison group members: their status at exit was assessed at their two-year annual recertification (or, in the case of households terminated before two years, at the time of termination). Using this criterion, 29 comparison group households had known

² The Housing Choice Voucher program is different from Bright Futures in both its administration and goals. This study is not intended as an evaluation of the Housing Choice Voucher program, its performance, or its participants. The comparison group used in this study is not representative of Housing Choice Voucher holders in general; that program serves a high proportion of elderly and disabled households excluded from the comparison group by screening criteria.

outcomes at exit, and 13 were considered comparable to “current participants” in Bright Futures (i.e., still held vouchers at the time of review but had for less than two years).

Table 1. Sample description for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Bright Futures N (%)	Comparison Group N (%)
Did not enroll	58 (N/A)	-
Total excluded	58 (N/A)	-
Currently enrolled (<24 months)	37 (17%)	13 (31%)
Known outcome	175 (83%)	29 (69%)
Total included	212 (100%)	42 (100%)

Demographics

Bright Futures participants did not differ significantly from comparison group members on race, marital status, or number of children in the household. However, the groups did differ significantly on gender and age of head of household. Comparison group households were more likely to be male-headed compared to Bright Futures households ($\chi^2=11.2067$, $p=.001$). Comparison group heads of household were also older on average by about six years ($t=4.9094$, $p<.0001$).

Table 2. Head of household demographics for Bright Futures participants and comparison group

	Bright Futures		Comparison Group		Test	p
<u>Race</u>	N=205	%	N=42	%		
American Indian/Alaska Native	66	32	22	52		
Asian	2	1	0	0		
Black/African American	43	21	5	12		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	<1	0	0		
White	90	44	15	36		
Multi-racial	3	1	0	0		
<u>Gender</u>	N=163	%	N=42	%	$\chi^2=11.21$.001
Female	158	97	35	83		
Male	5	3	7	17		
<u>Marital status at entry</u>	N=206	%	N=42	%		
Single, never married	179	87	37	88		
Married	2	1	3	7		
Separated	18	9	1	2		
Divorced	5	2	1	2		
Widowed/widower	2	1	0	0		
Age	Mean (n=163)	SD	Mean (n=42)	SD	t=4.91	<.0001
	27.9	6.8	33.9	8.1		
Number of children at entry	Mean (n=207)	SD	Mean (n=42)	SD		
	1.8	1.1	2.1	0.9		

Limitations

This evaluation is based on small groups, especially for the comparison group. Even for the larger Bright Futures group, the relatively small number of participants limits the statistical power of this study. An evaluation with groups of about 200 is powered to detect effects of about 0.30 standard deviation (for $\alpha = 0.05$ and power = 0.8). In previous studies (e.g., Gubits et al. 2016), standardized effect sizes for housing outcomes of the most successful housing interventions were in this range (0.15 to 0.45), but effect sizes for related outcomes (e.g., health and education) were smaller (around 0.15). Effect sizes for financial self-sufficiency were mostly around 0.15, and effect sizes for food security and economic stressors ranged from 0.17 to 0.21. Even if Bright Futures had effects on outcomes similar in magnitude to those seen in evaluations of other highly successful housing interventions, those effects might not be detected in this evaluation given the small group size. In particular, this evaluation may be underpowered for detecting effects on financial self-sufficiency and child outcomes.

Reports of findings from the survey administered to current and past participants are based on an even smaller sample. For the most part, survey results have been interpreted qualitatively and not subject to statistical testing. Additional caution should be used in interpreting survey results because responses may be subject to selection bias. That is, recruiting survey participants was difficult overall because eligible families by definition have or had unstable housing and may be highly mobile. For those who were successfully contacted, willingness to participate in the survey could have been affected by experience with the Bright Futures program or by current outcome status. Note, however, that this evaluation reports primarily on pre- and post-outcomes derived from review of administrative data and case files, which should not be subject to the same selection bias.

Because of the small sample size, results of this evaluation should not be generalized to the population at large, nor should characteristics of the comparison group be generalized to Housing Choice Voucher holders as a whole. The comparison group in this study represents a small subset of Housing Choice Voucher holders that does not reflect the characteristics of the program population at large.³

Although every effort has been made to address limitations, retrospective studies are, in their design, descriptive studies that cannot confirm or deny causal connections. By introducing a quasi-experimental comparison group, this evaluation accounts for some of the challenges in estimating causal effects using retrospective data. However, the comparison group used in this study may not represent the true counterfactual for Bright Futures participants. Despite efforts to match on available characteristics, there are observable differences between the two groups (see Table 2), and there are likely unobservable differences, too (e.g., motivation or desire to participate in case management). To fully evaluate the causal effects of Bright Futures would require a large-scale, multiyear randomized controlled trial. But given the nature of the program, randomizing assignment to Bright Futures or a control group that receives no treatment may be undesirable in practice.

³ For more information about the Housing Choice Voucher program, see https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet

3. BRIGHT FUTURES PROGRAM OUTCOMES

This section presents overall and specific program outcomes for Bright Futures participants. Overall outcome refers to reason for exiting the program (i.e., successful graduation, voluntary drop, or termination). Specific program outcomes include changes in education and employment, wages and income, and housing stability.

Outcomes

Bright Futures has a relatively high rate of participants who do not successfully graduate from the program, either because they voluntarily drop out of the program before graduating (22.9%) or because they are terminated from the program (38.9%). Since the program's inception, 67 (38.3%) households have successfully graduated (Table 3).

Reasons for leaving Bright Futures before graduation are presented in Table 4. The most frequently given reasons for voluntarily dropping from the program are voluntarily choosing to end participation (e.g., because participant feels they have made sufficient progress despite not completing the program) or moving away from the Sioux Falls area. The most frequent reasons for termination are non-compliance (e.g., not attending case management meetings) or failure to find and maintain employment.

These patterns in overall outcomes are consistent with findings from other evaluations of transitional housing programs. Transitional housing programs like Bright Futures are based on the assumption that programs can build skills and credentials (e.g., financial management, credit scores, or time clean and sober) that will help participants gain entry to permanent housing. Compared to other housing programs (e.g., Housing Choice Vouchers or housing first permanent supportive housing), transitional housing programs typically have high eligibility restrictions and place high demands on clients. On the one hand, these high demands can benefit participants with complex needs for whom a housing subsidy alone does not provide sufficient support; on the other hand, high demands may also lead to low enrollment and high drop-out rates by screening out high-need participants who stand to benefit most from case management. Indeed, other evaluations of transitional housing programs have found that high demand transitional housing that doubles as treatment may improve clinical outcomes for households with multiple problems who complete the program, but—because of the programs' very high attrition rates—do not have overall high success rates (Barrow and Zimmer 1999).

However, contrary to the finding elsewhere that high attrition rates negate overall success rates, Bright Futures participants on the whole do show significant improvements in employment, earnings from wages, and reduced need for rental assistance.

Table 3. Overall program outcomes

	n	%
Graduate	67	38.3
Voluntary drop	40	22.9
Terminated	68	38.9
Total	175	

Table 4. Reasons for leaving Bright Futures before graduating

	Voluntary drop		Terminated	
	N	%	N	%
Voluntary	11	35.5	-	
Moved away	11	35.5	-	
Illness	4	12.9		
Lost custody of children	-		2	2.9
No job	2	6.5	15	22.1
Non-compliant or no contact	-		20	29.4
No job and noncompliant	-		15	22.1
No job and jail	-		2	2.9
Jail or prison	-		7	10.3
Jail and drugs	-		4	5.9
Drugs	-			
Moved away and drugs			2	2.9
Other	3	9.7	1	1.5
<i>Total</i>	31	100	68	100

Note: Some Bright Futures participants enter the program as a condition of probation or parole, in which case noncompliance with Bright Futures requirements can lead to jail.

Education and Employment

Education level at entry and exit

Compared to the general population in the Sioux Falls area, Bright Futures participants have low levels of educational attainment. About 30% of Bright Futures participants do not have a high school diploma or GED at entry to the program, and nearly 80% enter with a high school diploma or less (Table 5). By comparison, the American Community Survey (2012-16) estimates that just 26% of female-headed families in Sioux Falls have a high school diploma or less.

With limited exceptions, Bright Futures participants do not experience significant change in educational attainment during their enrollment in the program. Review of case files turned up records of 12 participants completing college credits, a degree, or a certificate during their tenure in the Bright Futures program: 1 earned a GED, 5 earned some college credit, and 6 earned certificates. Although case note review may have missed earned degrees for which no records were kept, this finding suggests few participants earn a degree while in the program (Table 5).

Employment status at entry and exit

For the most part, previous studies of transitional housing programs have found that programs similar to Bright Futures have limited positive effects on employment (Bassuk et al. 2014). Individual studies have found employment rates at exit ranging from 38% (Matulef et al. 1995) to 61% (Fischer 2000), and they suggest employment gains plateau beyond the first year after exiting a program (Bodonyi and Erwin-Stewart 2007). Although the proportion of Bright Futures participants who are unemployed remains fairly steady from entry to exit, the proportion who are employed fulltime increases markedly from 37.7% at entry to 59.4% at exit (Table 6).

There is a significant association between employment at exit and program outcome ($\chi^2(6)=71.46$, $p<0.001$), as might be expected since employment is a condition of continued participation: successful graduates have the highest employment rate at exit, followed by voluntary drops; terminated participants have high rates of unemployment at exit, and in many cases unemployment was cause for termination (see Table 4).

However, there is no significant association for Bright Futures participants between employment at entry and exit—that is, participants do not simply maintain their employment status, whether employed or unemployed; that status actually changes during the program. From entry to exit, 67% of participants gained employment or remained employed, and nearly all who were employed at exit were working fulltime. Among successful graduates, 97% gained employment or remained employed, and all who were employed at exit were working fulltime (Table 7).

Mean time at current job

By the time they leave the program, employed participants have spent an average of 4.5 months in their current jobs. Half have been in their current jobs for 3 months or less, and 75% have been in their current jobs for 6 months or less (Table 8).

Table 5. Highest level of education at entry and exit

	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
No HS/GED	46	28.6	43	26.7
GED	32	19.9	31	19.3
High school diploma	48	29.8	44	27.3
Some college	17	10.6	19	11.8
Certificate	9	5.6	15	9.3
2-year degree	5	3.1	5	3.1
4-year degree	4	2.5	4	2.5
Total	161		161	

Table 6. Employment status at entry and exit

	Entry		Exit	
	n	%	n	%
All participants	162		138	
<i>Full-time</i>	61	37.7	82	59.4
<i>Part-time</i>	46	28.4	10	7.2
<i>Unemployed</i>	55	34.0	46	33.3
Graduates	61		58	
<i>Full-time</i>	30	49.2	56	96.6
<i>Part-time</i>	19	31.1	0	0.0
<i>Unemployed</i>	12	19.7	2	3.4
Voluntary Drop	37		30	
<i>Full-time</i>	15	40.5	16	53.3
<i>Part-time</i>	7	18.9	5	16.7
<i>Unemployed</i>	15	40.5	9	29.0
Terminated	62		50	
<i>Full-time</i>	16	25.8	10	20.0
<i>Part-time</i>	19	30.6	5	10.0
<i>Unemployed</i>	27	43.5	35	70.0

Table 7. Change in employment from entry to exit

	Gained Employment	Remained Employed	Remained Unemployed	Lost Employment
All participants (n=138)	28 (20.3%)	64 (46.4%)	19 (13.8%)	27 (19.6%)
Graduates (n=58)	11 (19.0%)	45 (77.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.4%)
Voluntary Drop (n=30)	11 (36.7%)	10 (33.3%)	3 (10.0%)	6 (20.0%)
Terminated (n=50)	6 (12.0%)	9 (18.0%)	16 (32.0%)	19 (38.0%)

Table 8. Mean time (in months) at current job at exit

	Mean	SD
All participants (n=84)	4.5	4.6
Graduates (n=51)	4.9	4.7
Voluntary Drop (n=20)	3.8	3.8
Terminated (n=12)	4.3	5.5

Wages and Income

Mean annual earnings from wages at entry and exit⁴

On the whole, Bright Futures participants see a significant increase in earnings from wages, an average of \$3,571 annually for all participants (including terminations and voluntary drops). In other words, despite the program’s high attrition rate, it still appears to have an overall positive effect on earnings from wages. However, that effect is driven by successful graduates, who make significant and large gains in earnings (average \$9,699 annually). Taken on their own, voluntary drops and terminations do not see a significant change in earnings from wages (Table 10).

Bright Futures participants enter the program with low wages, averaging just \$9,817 in annual earnings. Despite making significant gains, participants overall leave the program earning an average of \$13,388, well under the 2018 poverty guideline for a family of three (\$20,780). Even successful graduates—who enter with earnings averaging \$12,828 and make large and significant gains—still leave the program earning, on average, near-poverty wages of \$22,527 annually (Table 9).

Consider these wage levels in terms of local housing expenses. In 2018, fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in the Sioux Falls metropolitan statistical area (MSA) was \$781. In order to afford that rent, using the standard that a household should spend no more than 30% of its monthly income on rent, a family would need to earn at least \$31,240 annually. The MIT Living Wage Calculator estimates that a living wage for a family of 1 adult and 2 children in the Sioux Falls MSA would be closer to \$52,000 annually.⁵ In short, the Bright Futures program successfully increases earnings from wages, but not to a level that would allow participants to fully support themselves.

These findings are consistent with other evaluations of transitional housing programs, which have found that improved wages are still below livable or self-sufficient levels (Bassuk et al. 2014; Fischer 2000; Bodonyi and Erwin-Stewart 2007).

⁴ Sources of income were reported for various periods (e.g., hourly wage, monthly child support). For comparability, all sources of income have been annualized.

⁵ <http://livingwage.mit.edu/>

Job types at entry and exit with mean wage

Increased earnings in wages result from a variety of factors, including both higher rates of fulltime employment and higher hourly wages. They may also be related to changes in the type of work participants do.

Table 11 presents the distribution of Bright Futures participants by primary job type at entry and exit, along with reported annual wages by job type.⁶ From entry to exit, wages appear to increase across job types. This pattern could be due, in part, to overall changes in the labor market,⁷ but it is also likely due to participants' working longer hours or moving to better paying jobs within the same field. Individual participants may also have increased their wages by changing job types. For example, several participants earned higher wages after earning a CNA certificate and changing jobs.

Income from all sources

Although Bright Futures participants see an increase in earnings from wages, their material wellbeing may stay the same or decrease if increased earnings trade off with means-tested benefits. Indeed, in a national study of transitional housing programs, Matulef et al. (1995) found that, despite higher rates of employment, residents saw little change in income from entry to exit because increased earnings traded off with reduced receipt of public assistance.

To test this effect, this evaluation compared Bright Futures participants' total income at entry with total income at exit, where total income includes both earnings from wages and rental assistance. Participants are required to report changes in earnings, so that as earnings increase, rental assistance decreases. Nevertheless, even after accounting for decreases in rental assistance, Bright Futures participants still see an average increase in annual income of \$2,974. Successful graduates see an even larger increase in total income accounting for rental assistance, an average increase of \$8,423 annually (Table 12).

However, voluntary drops see no significant change in total income accounting for rental assistance, and terminated participants see a decrease of, on average, \$2,999 annually.

Of course, many Bright Futures participants receive other cash or near-cash benefits in addition to rental assistance (e.g., SNAP). However, because these benefits are recorded only at program entry and not at exit, data were not available to directly compare total income inclusive of benefits at entry and exit.

A very conservative estimate of program benefits can be made using an inclusive measure of total income at entry and assuming minimal receipt of benefits at exit. In this test, income at entry includes wages plus any reported rental assistance, TANF, SNAP, SSI/SSDI, child support, and unemployment. Total income at exit includes only wages plus any reported rental assistance. This test assumes that, at exit, participants no longer receive any TANF, SNAP, SSI/SSDI, child support, or unemployment.

Using this conservative test, Bright Futures participants overall do not see a significant change in their total income. That is, program participation has a neutral effect on total income, but it changes the composition of that income toward a higher proportion of earned income (wages) and a lower proportion of means-tested benefits (public assistance) (Table 13). If the program's aim is to decrease use of public

⁶ Annual wage earnings may include wages from other jobs for those who reported multiple jobs. At entry, 1 person reported 2 jobs. At exit, 5 people reported 2 jobs. Secondary jobs are not shown in the table. Also note that wage estimates do not include tips, which may be an important source of income for those who work in food services.

⁷ This hypothesis is addressed in Section 6. Bright Futures and Comparison Group Outcomes.

assistance without negatively affecting families' overall material wellbeing, it appears to have achieved that goal.

Even using this conservative test of program benefits, successful graduates still see a significant increase in total income, assuming complete cuts to all benefits except rental assistance—an increase, on average, of \$2,990 annually. Again, voluntary drops do not see a significant change in total income, and terminated participants see a significant decrease—an average of \$7,723 in total annual income. However, the decrease in terminated participants' income assumes all benefits are cut, an unlikely assumption given that these participants do not see significant increases in wages that would affect eligibility for means-tested benefits.

Table 9. Annual earnings from wages from entry to exit

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
All participants	9,817	8,403	128	13,388	11,087	128
Graduates	12,828	8,012	53	22,527	6,126	53
Voluntary Drop	9,622	8,778	27	11,108	9,672	27
Terminated	6,743	7,523	47	4,255	7,659	47

Table 10. Results of one-tailed t-tests for annual wages at entry and exit

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
All participants	3,571	1,058	128	1,477	5,664	3.37***	127
Graduates	9,699	1,239	53	7,214	12,185	7.38***	52
Voluntary Drop	1,486	2,688	27	-4,039	7,011	0.55	26
Terminated	-2,488	1,491	47	-5,489	514	0.95	46

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Table 11. Primary job type with mean annual wage at entry and exit

	Entry				Exit			
	Mean	SD	n	%	Mean	SD	n	%
Child care	13,966	6,678	9	8.3	24,159	5,752	6	6.8
Health aide	21,422	5,443	5	4.6	22,957	2,960	12	13.6
Food services	12,288	5,759	45	41.7	15,320	7,792	19	21.6
Cleaning	11,296	3,539	9	8.3	18,497	3,890	7	8.0
Factory work	20,800	-	1	0.9	24,856	4,265	2	2.3
Manual labor	11,440	-	1	0.9	22,955	2,949	4	4.6
Clerical	16,206	5,089	6	5.6	18,183	5,384	6	6.8
Management	10,920	-	1	0.9	21,320	735	3	3.4
Professional	30,472	-	1	0.9	27,019	8,325	2	2.3
Sales	13,887	5,218	16	14.8	18,316	5,583	8	9.1
Cashier	15,951	6,858	4	3.7	19,760	4,412	2	2.3
Call center	14,560	6,740	4	3.7	26,497	2,512	9	10.2
Other	17,247	3,545	6	5.6	23,109	2,349	8	9.1
Total	13,945	5,989	108		20,764	6,162	88	

Table 12. Two-tailed t-test for difference in total income (earnings and rental assistance) at entry and exit

	Mean	SE	n	95% CI for mean		t	df
	difference			difference			
All participants	2,974	1,043	107	905	5,043	2.85**	106
Graduates	8,423	1,207	46	5,991	10,854	6.98***	45
Voluntary Drop	2,416	2,840	21	-3,507	8,339	0.85	20
Terminated	-2,999	1,420	40	-5,871	-127	-2.11*	39

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Table 13. Two-tailed t-test for difference in total income at entry (earnings and cash or near-cash benefits) and exit (earnings and rental assistance without other benefits)

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
All participants	-1,947	1,207	84	-4,348	455	-1.61	83
Graduates	2,990	1,337	40	286	5,695	2.24*	39
Voluntary Drop	-4,388	3,267	17	-11,314	2,538	-1.34	16
Terminated	-7,723	1,885	27	-11,598	-3,849	4.10***	26

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Housing Stability

Prior evaluations of transitional housing programs have found some evidence of positive effects on housing status, with clients generally achieving something better than homelessness but short of stability (Bassuk et al. 2014). In an early study of transitional housing, the GAO (1991) found that 40% of clients had secured housing by the time of exit. Matulef et al. (1995) found that 56% of residents who left transitional housing entered stable housing, and those who successfully completed the program did so at much higher rates than those who left early (70% and one-third, respectively). Fischer (2000) found that, after leaving a transitional housing program, 43% of women reported having their own apartment and paying unsubsidized rent at follow-up. Evaluation of 1,500 families in the Seattle-area Sound Families Initiative found 68% of families moved into permanent housing. Among successful completers, 89% found permanent housing but only 11% found unsubsidized affordable housing (61% had Section 8 vouchers, 8% were in public housing, and 9% were in other subsidized housing), and three years after exit, over 50% of those who had maintained permanent housing still relied on vouchers to subsidize rent (Bodonyi and Erwin-Stewart 2007).

For this evaluation, detailed data on housing arrangements following Bright Futures were not available. However, the evaluation did consider changes in levels of rental assistance from program entry to program exit and receipt of alternative housing subsidies at program exit.

Rental assistance

On the whole, Bright Futures participants significantly reduce their level of rental assistance during their time in the program, from an average of \$504.57 per month at entry to an average of \$445.98 per month at exit, a monthly reduction of \$58.59 or \$703.08 annually. Graduates see an even larger decrease in rental assistance, from an average of \$458.76 per month at entry to an average of \$307.18 per month at exit, a monthly reduction of \$151.59 or \$1,819.08 annually (Table 14 and Table 15).

Voluntary drops and terminated participants do not see a significant change in level of rental assistance from entry to exit.

Calculated as a percentage of rent, on average, Bright Futures participants reduce their rental assistance from 74.6% of rent at entry to 65.7% of rent at exit, a reduction of 8.9 percentage points. Successful graduates reduce their level of rental assistance from 68.0% of rent at entry to 43.4% of rent at exit, an average reduction of 24.6 percentage points (Table 16 and Table 17). Again, voluntary drops and terminated participants did not see a significant change in level of rental assistance.

As with income, Bright Futures participants overall—and especially graduates—see significant improvement when it comes to rental assistance. But despite this improvement, by the time they leave the program, even successful graduates do not appear to have reached an income level that would allow them to pay full rent without assistance.

Housing arrangements after Bright Futures

Regardless of continued need for rental assistance at exit, Bright Futures participants are no longer eligible for Bright Futures – related rental assistance once they leave the program. Participants who are not able to pay full rent at the time they leave Bright Futures must find an alternative subsidy or lower rent or incur a housing cost burden (i.e., spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent).

Overall, about 62% of Bright Futures participants transition in place when leaving the program—i.e., remain in the same apartment but without Bright Futures supports. There is a significant association between program outcome and transitioning in place, with transitioning in place more common among successful graduates ($\chi^2(2)=26.9, p < .001$) (Table 18).

At exit, participants may be eligible for other forms of rental assistance or subsidized housing. Yet only 8 of 159 participants were found to have left the program with a permanent Housing Choice Voucher (5 graduates and 3 voluntary drops). Data were not available on whether participants might have moved into project-based subsidized housing.

Receipt of alternative housing subsidies at exit may be an important metric to track going forward. Other studies of transitional housing have found that departing a transitional housing program with a rent subsidy is associated with having one’s own place at exit and with limiting movements of members in and out of the household (Burt 2010). They suggest that programs that connect participants to permanent (subsidized) housing may be more successful because they allow clients to transition in place and, by allowing continued subsidies, help guarantee families can afford housing and remain housed (Barrow and Zimmer 1999, Bodonyi and Erwin-Stewart 2007).

Table 14. Monthly rental assistance at entry and exit

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
All participants	504.57	205.08	128	445.98	251.11	128
Graduates	458.76	171.16	51	307.18	233.03	51
Voluntary Drop	526.15	217.07	26	526.27	201.23	26
Terminated	539.37	224.39	51	543.84	229.88	51

Table 15. One-tailed t-test for difference in monthly rental assistance at entry and exit

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
All participants	58.59	19.95	128	19.11	98.08	2.94**	127
Graduates	151.59	30.40	51	90.53	212.65	4.99***	50
Voluntary Drop	-0.12	32.64	26	-67.34	67.11	-0.00	25
Terminated	-4.47	32.48	51	-69.70	60.76	-0.14	50

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Table 16. Rental assistance as a percentage of rent at entry and exit

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
All participants	74.6	23.2	124	65.7	32.1	124
Graduates	68.0	24.2	51	43.4	31.6	51
Voluntary Drop	78.3	22.7	25	79.0	23.6	25
Terminated	79.6	21.0	48	82.5	20.9	48

Table 17. One-tailed t-test for difference (in percentage points) in rental assistance (as percentage of rent) at entry and exit

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
All participants	-8.9	3.0	124	-14.8	-3.0	-2.97**	123
Graduates	-24.6	4.4	51	-33.4	-15.8	-5.62***	50
Voluntary Drop	.6	4.7	25	-9.0	10.2	.13	24
Terminated	2.9	4.8	48	-6.9	12.6	.60	47

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Table 18. Bright Futures participants who transitioned in place

	Transitioned in place (%)	n
All participants	62.2	119
Graduates	86.0	57
Voluntary Drop	35.5	31
Terminated	45.2	31

$\chi^2(2)=26.9, p < .001$

4. PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS

Comparative evaluation of other transitional housing programs found that program size and length of stay are both associated with client outcomes: Smaller programs are associated with more success in housing stability and family preservation, but larger programs are associated with higher levels of educational attainment during the program. Longer stays are associated with higher levels of educational attainment and employment at exit as well as with higher rates of continued employment and permanent housing during the year following exit (Burt 2010).

This evaluation considered these known predictors of outcomes alongside other potential predictors, including demographic characteristics, economic characteristics at entry, and intensity and duration of program participation.

By and large, demographic characteristics are not associated with Bright Futures program outcomes, with the exception of an association between race and change in annual earnings. Race was not associated with other program outcomes. The overall lack of association between demographic characteristics and outcomes suggests Bright Futures operates equitably.

For Bright Futures participants, economic characteristics at entry are associated with eventual outcomes, though not in straightforward ways: for example, participants who enter employed and with higher wages more commonly graduate, but also tend to see smaller changes in annual earnings and levels of rental assistance. This pattern of association suggests a dual program effect: participants who enter with a higher degree of economic stability may have an easier time staying the course in order to graduate, but at the same time, Bright Futures narrows economic gaps by yielding larger gains in employment and earnings for those who enter farthest behind.

Intensity and duration of program participation are associated with eventual outcomes for Bright Futures participants, a dose-response pattern that suggests a causal relationship between Bright Futures participation and improvement on outcomes. In particular, participants with more coach visits and more completed classes more often graduate, are employed at exit, and see increases in annual earnings and decreases in levels of rental assistance.

These relationships are summarized in Table 19 and discussed in more detail below.

Table 19. Summary of associations between participant attributes and program outcomes

	Program Outcome	Employment at Exit	Change in Annual Earnings	Change in Level of Rental Assistance
<u>Demographic Characteristics</u>				
Race			X	
Age				
Marital status				
Number of children				
<u>Economic Characteristics</u>				
Education at entry				+
Employment at entry	+		-	-
Wages at entry	+		-	-
Income at entry	+		-	-
Chronically homeless	-			
Rental assistance at entry	+			-
<u>Duration and Intensity of Participation</u>				
Months in Bright Futures	+			
Number of coach visits	+	+		
Number of classes completed	+	+	+	+
Date of entry				

Demographic Characteristics

Race

There is no significant association between Bright Futures program outcome (i.e., graduation, voluntary drop, termination) and race. There is no significant association between race and employment at exit or between race and change in level of rental assistance.

However, there is a significant association between race and change in annual earnings ($F(5, 122) = 3.16$, $p = .0102$). Compared to white participants, black participants see significantly larger increases in earnings ($p < .05$). Other groups do not see a significant difference in change in earnings compared to the change seen by white participants. This pattern may be due, in part, to the fact that black participants enter with significantly lower average annual earnings than white participants (two-tailed $t(100) = 2.1159$, $p = .0368$); by the time they leave the program, however, black participants have caught up to white participants in terms of annual earnings—the two groups do not differ significantly on annual earnings at exit (Table 20). But American Indian participants also enter with lower average annual earnings and do not see the same boost in earnings. From entry to exit, white and black participants see a significant increase in earnings, while overall, American Indian participants do not see a significant change (Table 21).

Age

This evaluation found no significant association between age at entry and program outcome, employment status at exit, change in annual earnings from wages, or change in level of rental assistance.

Marital status

This evaluation found no significant association between marital status at entry and program outcome, employment status at exit, change in annual earnings from wages, or change in level of rental assistance.

Number of children

This evaluation found no significant association between number of children at entry and program outcome, employment status at exit, change in annual earnings from wages, or change in level of rental assistance.

Table 20. Annual earnings from wages from entry to exit by race

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
White	11,942	7,276	61	14,592	10,788	61
Black	7,367	10,129	24	16,903	11,051	24
American Indian	8,515	8,506	39	9,061	10,670	39

Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial participants omitted due to small group size.

Table 21. Results of one-tailed t-tests for change in annual earnings from wages from entry to exit by race

	Mean	SE	n	95% CI for mean		t	df
	difference			difference			
White	2,650	1,455	61	-260	5,560	1.8216*	60
Black	9,536	2,328	24	4,721	14,351	4.0966**	23
American Indian	546	1,904	39	-3,310	4,401	0.2866	38

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001 (Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial participants omitted due to small group size.)

Economic Characteristics

Education at entry

This evaluation did not find a significant association between education and program outcome, employment at exit, or change in annual earnings from wages.

Education at entry is significantly associated with change in level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent ($F(7, 115)=3.24, p=.0036$). Compared to participants who enter with a high school diploma, those who enter with a 4-year degree see significantly larger decreases in rental assistance as a percentage of rent.

Employment at entry

There is no significant association between employment at entry and employment at exit, which suggests Bright Futures participants change their employment status during the program.

There is a significant association between employment at entry and program outcome: those who eventually graduate are more likely to have entered the program employed ($\chi^2(6)=17.11, p=0.009$).

There is a significant (but negative) association between employment at entry and change in annual earnings from wages: participants who enter employed see lower average changes in annual earnings from wages ($F(3, 124)=13.9, p<.0001$). There is also a significant negative association between employment at entry and change in level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent ($F(3, 120)=4.09, p=.0084$): those who enter unemployed see significantly larger decreases in level of rental assistance. Taken together, these associations suggest that Bright Futures participants who enter unemployed make more significant progress than those who enter with employment, a catch-up effect.

Wages at entry

This evaluation found no significant association between annual earnings from wages at entry and employment at exit.

There is a significant association between earnings at entry and program outcome: graduates entered with higher wages than those who left voluntarily or were terminated ($F(2, 156)=6.11, p=.0028$). However, the association between wages at exit and outcome is stronger: graduates have much higher wages at exit than do voluntary drops or terminations ($F(2, 124)=74.30, p<.0001$) (see Table 9).

Wages at entry are also significantly (but negatively) correlated with change in annual wages ($r=-.452, p<.0001$) and change in level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent ($r=-.278, p=.0018$). This finding corroborates the catch-up effect observed in the associations between employment at entry and program outcomes: participants who start farther behind in terms of wages make larger gains, catching up to those who start farther ahead.

Income at entry

Like earnings from wages, total income (including cash and near-cash benefits) at entry is significantly associated with eventual program outcome: participants who go on to graduate tend to enter with higher total income ($F(2, 117)=4.88, p=.0092$).

Consistent with the catch-up effect described above, total income is significantly (but negatively) correlated with change in annual wages ($r=-.432, p<.0001$) and change in level of rental assistance as a

percentage of rent ($r=-.261$, $p=.0094$). In other words, even accounting for total income inclusive of cash and near-cash benefits, those who start farther behind make the biggest gains.

Chronically homeless

Entering as chronically homeless is significantly associated with eventual program outcome ($\chi^2(2)=6.456$, $p=.040$, see Table 22). Compared to graduates, participants who voluntarily left Bright Futures or who were terminated were more likely to have been chronically homeless when they entered.

However, this evaluation found no significant association between entering as chronically homeless and employment at exit, change in annual earnings, or change in level of rental assistance.

Rental assistance at entry

This evaluation did not find a significant association between level of rental assistance at entry and employment status at exit or change in annual earnings.

However, there is a significant association between level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent at entry and eventual program outcome ($F(2, 156) = 4.28$, $p = .0155$): participants who go on to graduate enter with lower levels of rental assistance than those who go on to leave voluntarily or to be terminated (Table 16).

There is also a significant negative association between level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent at entry and change in level of rental assistance ($r=-.3974$, $p<.0001$). This correlation reflects the catch-up effect observed above: participants who enter with higher levels of rental assistance as a percentage of rent see larger average decreases in level of rental assistance.

Table 22. Program outcome for chronically homeless participants

	Chronically homeless (%)	n
<u>Program outcome</u>		
Graduates	30.8	52
Voluntary Drop	51.6	31
Terminated	53.7	54
Total	44.5	137

$\chi^2(2)=6.456$, $p=.040$

Duration and Intensity of Participation

Duration and intensity of participation were measured based on months spent in Bright Futures, number of coach (case management) visits during program participation, and number of classes completed. A positive association between duration and intensity of participation and outcomes suggests a causal dose-response effect (i.e., a higher “dose” of the Bright Futures program yields a larger “response” in terms of program outcomes). Although a positive association lends credence to causal hypotheses, recognize that confounding variables could exist (e.g., a family’s willingness and motivation to improve and make changes that would lead them to stay in the program longer and also result in more positive outcomes).

Consistent with a dose-response effect, this evaluation finds a significant association between measures of duration and intensity of participation and program outcomes, including overall outcome (i.e., graduation, voluntary drop, or termination), employment at exit, changes in annual earnings, and changes in level of rental assistance.

Average months spent in Bright Futures

Bright Futures participants may spend up to 24 months in the program. No minimum length of participation is defined, and case managers explain that duration of participation depends on individual needs, goals, and plans.

There is a significant association between the number of months spent in Bright Futures and eventual program outcome (Table 23): successful graduates spend longer, on average, in the program ($F(2, 167)=11.84, p<.0001$). However, number of months in the program is not significantly associated with employment at exit, change in annual earnings from wages, or level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent.

Average number of coach visits

Bright Futures participants are required to attend regular meetings with coaches (case managers) to develop a family self-sufficiency plan, set goals, and update progress.

There is a significant association between the number of coach visits a participant has and the participant's eventual program outcome (Table 24): successful graduates have more coach visits on average ($F(2, 157)=17.82, p=.0001$). The number of coach visits is also significantly associated with employment status at exit ($F(3, 132)=4.87, p=.0031$). However, the number of coach visits is not significantly associated with change in annual earnings from wages or change in level of rental assistance.

Average number of classes completed

Bright Futures participants are required to attend a series of classes on topics such as tenant rights and responsibilities, consumer credit, financial planning, and nutrition.

There is a significant association between the number of Bright Futures classes completed by a participant and eventual program outcome (Table 25): graduates complete more classes ($F(2, 152)=20.92, p<.0001$). Number of classes completed is also significantly associated with employment at exit ($F(3, 127)=6.87, p=.0003$). Number of classes completed is significantly and positively correlated with change in annual earnings from wages ($r=.187, p=.0397$) and change in level of rental assistance as a percentage of rent ($r=.232, p=.0116$).

Date of entry

Because Bright Futures began in 2011 and has evolved as a program over time, program staff hypothesized an association between date of entry and program outcomes. However, this evaluation found no significant association between date of entry to Bright Futures and eventual program outcome or between date of entry and employment at exit, change in annual earnings from wages, or change in level of rental assistance.

Table 23. Mean months spent in Bright Futures by program outcome

	Mean	SD	n
All participants	7.97	5.65	170
Graduates	10.28	5.99	64
Voluntary Drop	7.94	5.79	40
Terminated	5.74	4.21	66

Table 24. Mean number of coach visits by program outcome

	Mean	SD	n
All participants	26.4	18.8	160
Graduates	36.2	18.9	60
Voluntary Drop	24.7	18.8	38
Terminated	17.9	13.6	62

Table 25. Mean number of Bright Futures classes completed by program outcome

	Mean	SD	n
All participants	2.4	1.5	155
Graduates	3.2	1.2	61
Voluntary Drop	2.3	1.3	36
Terminated	1.6	1.5	58

Qualitative Feedback

Participants' Perspectives

Current and past participants who were surveyed were asked to share their perspectives on how Bright Futures has helped them, ways in which Bright Futures was not able to help, the most important components of the program, the most challenging parts of the program, and suggestions for Bright Futures going forward. A summary of their responses is presented below.

What has Bright Futures helped you with? Or, what do you think you have been able to do because you are participating in Bright Futures?

Reflecting on how Bright futures had helped them, past participants most frequently cited help with housing, money management, and personal development (e.g., attending counseling, becoming a better parent, setting goals, and making responsible choices). A few also mentioned the significance of case

mangers' referrals to other programs, as well as the support and "push...to not be lazy" they received from case managers.

Current participants, like past participants, most frequently mentioned the importance of housing, money management, and personal development. Just under half of current participants surveyed named housing as one of the things Bright Futures had helped them secure. Fully half talked about learning to budget and prioritize spending in order to pay necessary expenses and save money for long-term goals. As one participant put it, Bright Futures helped me "distinguish between fantasy and reality with purchases and prioritize necessary things." Half of the current participants surveyed also mentioned personal development, including reduced stress and an improved ability to parent, maturing and being more responsible, and having hope for their families' futures. One participant explained that Bright Futures "has helped me see a way where I can see no way—not just to get by, but to actually survive comfortably."

What are things you or your family needs, but Bright Futures hasn't been able to help with, or for which being in Bright Futures hasn't made a difference?

For the most part, past participants said they could not recall anything with which Bright Futures had been unable to help, though two respondents did say they could have used additional legal help.

Similarly, 7 of 17 current participants said they could not think of anything they needed that Bright Futures had not been able to provide or make a referral. Among current participants who did report unmet needs, the most frequently mentioned was transportation: about one-fourth of current participants surveyed cited transportation as an outstanding need. A similar number mentioned the need for childcare. For example, one reported having to cut work hours due to lack of childcare, and another said she had not been able to start GED classes because she had no evening childcare available.

Additional needs mentioned by two or more current participants include scheduling visits with representative payees (especially over holidays or in emergencies), a need for additional financial assistance, or feeling stressed from the pressure of meeting program requirements. A couple of the most recently enrolled current participants said they wished they had more guidance (e.g., with move-in tasks such as forwarding mail or with requesting help from other agencies after a referral).

What things do you think are most important about Bright Futures, including people and activities, in helping you and other families?

Every past participant surveyed cited their case manager as one of the most important components of the Bright Futures program. Specifically, they praised case managers for their sincerity, personal connection, ability to relate, and swiftness and resourcefulness in making referrals. Half of the past participants also said that the required classes were valuable; a couple acknowledged the classes had seemed unnecessary or burdensome at the time, but in retrospect they appreciated them. One past participant said she still refers back to handouts she received in those classes. Half of past participants also highlighted referrals to resources as a key component of the program, including referrals for furniture, holiday food baskets and gifts, counseling, and employment.

For current participants, case managers and classes were among the most frequently cited things seen as central to Bright Futures. About half of current participants said they had gained hope and encouragement from meeting with their case managers and that they found weekly meetings valuable. About two-fifths of current participants said they felt they had learned valuable information from the required classes, including how to build and maintain consumer credit and how to identify red flags for unhealthy

relationships. Other components mentioned by at least two current participants include learning to budget and build savings, help with housing, and referrals for other resources.

What are the most challenging parts of Bright Futures for you or your family?

When past participants reflected on the most challenging parts of Bright Futures, nearly all of them named scheduling and time management. They spoke about the difficulty of making it to required classes, weekly meetings, and home visits on top of juggling fulltime employment and childcare. Just under half of past participants specifically mentioned the difficulty of keeping children occupied during classes or weekly meetings, especially when they felt uncomfortable talking about certain topics in front of their children. About one-fourth mentioned the representative payee requirement as a challenge, saying it had been difficult to turn over control of their money.

Among current participants, payee arrangements were the most frequently cited challenge, followed by scheduling and time management. Half of current participants said that representative payee was the most challenging aspect of Bright Futures. They spoke not only about the difficulty of yielding control over their money, but also the inconvenience of having to schedule meetings with their payee, sometimes facing delays before a meeting could be scheduled. As with past participants, current participants also said that juggling program requirements with fulltime work and childcare was challenging. In particular, several participants spoke about the difficulty of bringing children along to required classes that were held in the evening. They found it difficult to make it to classes and to pay attention with children present. Three participants pointed out that their lack of reliable transportation made it even more difficult to make it to classes and meetings.

Do you have any suggestions for making Bright Futures better?

Half of the past participants surveyed said they thought the program already works well and had no suggestions for improvements. Those who did offer suggestions proposed more formal ongoing support and follow-up after graduation or providing programming for older children. Two past participants said they would like to see more programs tailored to single fathers or support for fathers' rights.

The majority (10 of 17) of current participants agreed the program already works well and offered no suggestions. Those who did offer suggestions proposed offering classes more often and at a wider variety of times to accommodate work and family schedules, providing newer toys for children during weekly meetings to keep them busy, giving each new participant a planner to track appointments and bills due, making saving a mandatory part of the program, or offering small rewards for reaching program milestones (e.g., gift cards or vouchers for gas or underwear). A couple current participants said they would have liked more support, especially when they first began the program, whether meeting more frequently (e.g., twice weekly) or having more directive help with housing and job searches.

When given an opportunity to add any additional comments, past and current participants alike praised the program, and especially the case managers. "If it wasn't for them," a past participant reflected, "I wouldn't be here. They helped me with a home, and nothing can compare to that—and they teach you how to keep that home."

Case Managers' Perspectives

Case managers were also interviewed as part of this evaluation in order to understand their perspective and experiences with Bright Futures.

In interviews, case managers said they saw their role first and foremost as building trust with participants and making them feel comfortable knowing they can turn to case managers as someone to depend on. They described their most important tasks as giving direction and providing a listening ear while helping participants develop the life skills necessary to achieve stability. Case managers especially focused on using the representative payee requirement as an opportunity to teach money management and budgeting.

According to case managers, mental health is an important piece in shaping participants' experiences in the program and long-term success. They reflected that many participants enter the program with a history of trauma, so they often work with participants to overcome apprehension about seeking counseling. Case managers mentioned untreated mental health issues, particularly depression, as a major challenge for participants and one of the major reasons participants leave the program before graduating. Drug use was also mentioned as a significant challenge that often contributes to participants' dropping out or being terminated from the program.

Case managers acknowledged that culture and family ties can present challenges for participants. Participants may struggle to find new friends or to build a social support system to reinforce positive change. Some may feel pulled by family or friends to leave the program. Case managers reported that cultural difference may also affect American Indian participants' outcomes in the program.

Participants may also leave the program early if they entered not by choice but on the strong recommendation of a probation officer, case managers reported. Others may leave, they explained, because they do not want to follow program requirements (e.g., representative payee, weekly meetings).

Transportation was singled out as a logistical barrier that can limit participants' employment, daycare, and school options, making it difficult to achieve progress on these fronts. Night transportation, case managers reported, is especially difficult for participants working night shifts or attending GED classes at Southeast Technical Institute. Case managers encourage participants to get drivers licenses and cars, but affordable cars may not be dependable cars, so they are not a silver bullet.

In terms of predictors of success, case managers said ambition, determination, and drive are the most important: "If they follow through and work hard, they're going to succeed," said one. For case managers, participant success comes not just in finding a job, but in gaining confidence and self-esteem and belief in self-efficacy, that is, the ability to set and achieve goals.

Case managers said that, in their view, the services offered by Bright Futures are a good match to families' needs, though transportation remains an intractable problem. One case manager suggested expanding the program to also serve struggling families who are not yet homeless—that is, provide life skills and case management before families are homeless in order to preserve housing and avoid eviction.

Finally, case managers explained that partnerships are central to the program's success—not only partnerships with the City of Sioux Falls and the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission, but also relationships with other agencies that allow Bright Futures to refer families for a range of services that Bright Futures could not provide on its own. Case managers also said that good working relationships with landlords facilitate finding housing for participants entering the program.

5. BRIGHT FUTURES LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Follow-up surveys were completed by 8 Bright Futures graduates and 17 current Bright Futures participants. On average, graduates surveyed for follow-up had left Bright Futures 1.5 years before the survey. Time since graduation ranged from 6 months to over 6 years. Survey results are presented as an indication of possible long-term outcomes for Bright Futures participants. Given the small sample size, caution should be exercised in interpreting results, which may not be generalizable to the population.

Education level

Two of eight graduates surveyed reported returning to school since graduating from Bright Futures, but none had yet earned a degree. Though this finding is based on a small sample, it suggests that Bright Futures stabilizes participants' housing and employment, laying the groundwork for future investments in human capital; that is, participants in Bright Futures may continue to accrue benefits even after completing the program.

Employment status

Survey results suggest that employment gains are lasting and graduates are able to maintain employment after leaving Bright Futures. In the follow-up survey, 7 of 8 graduates were currently employed: 4 fulltime, 3 part-time.

At follow-up, graduates were not only employed but also demonstrated stable employment. On average, graduates in the survey had been at their current jobs for 2.5 years. Length of time at current job ranged from 9 months to 6 years. By comparison, current Bright Futures participants who were surveyed had been at their current jobs for an average of 5.7 months, a significant difference ($t=-3.79$, $p=.0006$).

Annual earnings from wages

Graduates also appear to maintain wage gains. Overall, annual earnings from wages for graduates in the survey were not significantly different from their wages at exit; however, annual wages were, on average, \$5,974 higher than they had been at entry ($t=2.5269$, $p=.0224$). Four fulltime employees averaged \$35,573 in wages annually; three part-time employees averaged \$17,073 annually.

Job types among graduates in the survey include child care, food service, cleaning, clerical, call center, and other.

Total income

Surveyed graduates were asked to report all sources of income, including cash and near-cash benefits, so total income at follow-up could be compared to total income at entry, accounting for any changes in receipt of benefits. Even after accounting for changes in benefits, graduates in the survey had significantly higher total incomes at follow-up than they had at entry, an average increase of \$5,594 ($t=2.0226$, $p=.0495$). This net increase in income was seen despite observed reductions in benefits received. In other words, graduates in the survey had earnings from wages that more than made up for losses in benefits.

On average, graduates in the survey had received cash or near-cash benefits at entry totaling \$466/month, or \$5,592 annually.⁸ At follow-up, average cash benefits for graduates were reduced to \$287/month, or \$3,444 annually, an average annual decrease of \$2,148. Specific sources of benefits are detailed below:

- TANF – At entry, 15 of 162 (9.3%) Bright Futures participants reported receiving TANF in an average reported monthly amount of \$415. TANF at exit was not recorded. None of the graduates surveyed had received TANF at entry to Bright Futures, nor did any report receiving TANF at follow up. By comparison, the American Community Survey (2012-16) estimates 16% of female-headed families in Sioux Falls received TANF or SSI in the last 12 months.
- SNAP – Of 163 Bright Futures participants with known SNAP status at entry, 90% received SNAP. The average monthly SNAP benefit received at entry was \$427. SNAP at exit was not recorded. Of graduates who were surveyed, 5 of 7 (with 1 unknown) received SNAP at entry with an average SNAP benefit of \$405/month. At follow up, 5 of 8 still received SNAP, but the average monthly SNAP benefit was reduced to \$287. By comparison, the American Community Survey (2012-16) estimates 41% of female-headed families with children in Sioux Falls receive SNAP.
- WIC – Of 162 Bright Futures participants with known WIC status at entry, 25% received WIC. Of graduates who were surveyed, 2 of 8 received WIC at entry, but none were receiving WIC at follow-up. Change in WIC receipt is likely due to children aging out of eligibility.
- Childcare assistance – Overall, 24 of 154 (16%) Bright Futures participants reported receiving child care assistance at entry, with an average monthly award of \$774. Of graduates surveyed, 1 of 8 had reported receiving childcare assistance at entry. At follow up, 6 did not receive childcare assistance; 1 received assistance and another received childcare through Birth to 3.
- Child support – At entry, 29 of 163 Bright Futures participants reported receiving child support in an average monthly amount of \$331. Of graduates surveyed, 3 of 7 (1 missing) reported receiving child support at entry (average \$237/month). At follow up, 1 of 8 graduates reported receiving child support now.

Housing stability

Evaluations of other transitional housing programs suggest that this type of program is less successful at improving housing stability than a permanent voucher or subsidy (Gubits et al. 2016). For example, evaluation of the Seattle-area Sound Families Initiative found that, at each of three annual follow-ups, over one-fifth of families had made at least one late rent payment in the prior year, more than one-fourth had received a utility disconnection notice, and by the three year follow-up, 15% had been evicted or told to leave their homes. In that program, mobility rates remained high, so that by three years out, 63% of families had moved at least once and 50% had moved more than once. However, these moves appeared to be due to choice and less disruptive to lives and schooling than forced moves (Bodonyi and Erwin-Stewart 2007).

⁸ For Bright Futures participants overall, total cash benefits (other than rental assistance) received at entry averaged \$547.

In an evident departure from this pattern, Bright Futures graduates appear to maintain improvements in housing stability. Though mobility rates for Bright Futures graduates are high (62.5% of graduates surveyed had moved at least once since leaving the program), levels of rental assistance remain low, none of the graduates surveyed experienced eviction, and two have become homeowners. Specific dimensions of housing stability are discussed below:

- Residential mobility – Six of eight graduates surveyed transitioned in place when they graduated from Bright Futures (i.e., stayed in the same apartment). At follow-up, three of eight graduates in the survey were still living in the same place as when they graduated; five had moved at least once (including three who initially transitioned in place). The number of moves is loosely related to length of time since leaving Bright Futures. For graduates surveyed, the average number of moves since leaving Bright Futures is 1.6, and the average moves per year is 0.65.
- Rental assistance – None of the graduates surveyed for follow-up left Bright Futures with a housing voucher, and six of eight now pay full rent or housing costs without assistance. Two of the graduates surveyed reported owning their homes.⁹ Of those who receive assistance, one has a Housing Choice Voucher, and one lives in project-based housing with income-based rent. On average, graduates in the survey pay about 85% of their rent (with 15% assisted).
- Unpaid bills, missed rent, and eviction –Two of eight graduates surveyed for follow-up reported that, at some point since leaving Bright Futures, they had been unable to pay a bill such as heat, water, electricity, internet, or phone. However, none of them had gone without heat or water since leaving Bright Futures. Two of eight graduates surveyed said they had a time when they were unable to pay rent, but none had ever been evicted since leaving Bright Futures.
- Crowded or unstable housing – One of eight graduates surveyed reported having temporarily lived in overcrowded housing (doubled up with family) at some point since leaving Bright Futures. None reported having ever been in unstable housing (i.e., no reliable housing or staying in a place they knew they couldn't stay long) since leaving Bright Futures.

Health and wellbeing

The survey asked both past and current participants about their general health and wellbeing and insurance status.

Health status was recorded for 125 Bright Futures participants at entry, at which point most reported excellent or very good health. Graduates surveyed for follow-up and current participants in the survey had similar health reports. No patterns were evident.

At follow-up, graduates appear to have lower rates of insurance coverage than participants at entry. At entry, 92.1% of Bright Futures participants had insurance coverage (n=127). But at follow-up, 4 of 8 past participants had no insurance coverage. Of those who did have insurance, 3 had private coverage through employers and 1 had Medicaid. Of the 4 with no insurance, 3 had CHIP coverage for children (6 of 8 overall reported having CHIP for children at follow-up). Only 1 household reported no insurance coverage for anyone in the household.

This apparent loss of insurance coverage could be due to losing income eligibility for Medicaid with higher earnings from wages. At entry, 72.5% of 160 Bright Futures participants had Medicaid coverage (n=160), and 90.5% had CHIP coverage for their children (n=158). Among 8 graduates surveyed for follow-up, 4 had Medicaid at entry (1 unknown) and 5 had CHIP for children (1 unknown). At follow up, of those who had

⁹ This question was not part of the survey; information was volunteered.

entered Bright Futures with Medicaid coverage, just 1 of 8 reported still having Medicaid coverage, 2 no longer had insurance coverage, and 1 had private coverage through an employer.

Of graduates without insurance, 1 had recently lost coverage after leaving work, 1 had income low enough to qualify for Medicaid, and 2 had income around \$24,000 annually. Of note, the survey asked about individual income, not household income. Although none had reported a legal change in marital status, they might have lost Medicaid eligibility if they were living with another income earner.

Food security

The survey included the USDA's six-item short form food security survey module, which screens for household food security status. Food security is not only important to health; it is also an indicator of overall material wellbeing. For example, low food security could indicate that, whatever income levels may seem to indicate, a household lacks the means to meet its basic needs.

Food security status was not recorded in case files, so it is not known at entry. In the survey, both current participants and graduates were screened for food security. Current participants can be compared to graduates, with the caveat that comparisons do not indicate within-household change (it is unknown whether or not graduates were food insecure in the past).

Survey results suggest that Bright Futures graduates are significantly less likely than current participants to experience food insecurity. Just 1 of 8 (13%) graduates reported some level of food insecurity, compared to 11 of 17 (65%) current participants ($\chi^2(1)=5.94$, $p=.015$).

Benefits to children

Bright Futures specifically serves families with children, and indeed, housing outcomes are important for children. Housing instability and poor housing quality have been linked to lower school achievement and increased risk of dropping out, poorer social and emotional adjustment, psychological and behavioral problems, illness, and developmental delays (Ziol-Guest and McKenna 2014). Homelessness may also indirectly affect children's emotional and behavioral health through its effect on parental stress and parenting behaviors (Coley et al. 2013).

The survey asked graduates about their perceptions of their children's academic performance, attendance, and behavior at school since participating in Bright Futures. All 6 of the graduates surveyed who had children in school during and after Bright Futures reported that their children's attendance, achievement, and behavior were about the same or better as before Bright Futures.

None of the graduates surveyed for follow up reported any school moves for children (i.e., no mobility).

6. BRIGHT FUTURES AND COMPARISON GROUP OUTCOMES

This section presents the results of quasi-experimental comparison of Bright Futures participants (the treated or experimental group) and Housing Choice Voucher holders (the control or comparison group). This comparison was incorporated to better estimate the counterfactual (i.e., what would have happened to Bright Futures participants had they not taken part in the program). Because of the retrospective design of this evaluation, the comparison group had to be drawn from an existing program in order to make use of previously collected administrative data. Comparison group members were selected from among Housing Choice Voucher recipients. To maximize comparability between the two groups, comparison group members were selected if they met the following screening criteria:

- Received voucher between 2011 and 2017 (parallel to Bright Futures enrollment dates)
- Families with children
- Homeless at the time they received voucher
- Head of household not disabled (since work is a requirement of Bright Futures)

The comparison group is quasi-experimental in that group members were not randomly assigned, and the comparison group does not represent usual care absent Bright Futures. Rather, the comparison group consists of households that received rental assistance without case management and without the two-year time limit that applies to Bright Futures rental assistance.

In interpreting results, keep in mind that the Housing Choice Voucher program has a different form and different goals than Bright Futures. Previous comparisons of transitional housing programs such as Bright Futures with permanent housing subsidies such as Housing Choice Vouchers have found that these two different types of programs have different effects. The Family Options Study, one of the most comprehensive comparisons of housing interventions to date, followed 2,282 families for 36 months, comparing outcomes for families randomly assigned to receive a permanent housing subsidy, community-based rapid re-housing, project-based transitional housing¹⁰, or usual care. It found that permanent subsidies improve housing stability more than do transitional housing programs, but at the expense of work effort: heads of households who receive permanent subsidies were less likely to be employed at follow-up and had lower earnings than those in transitional housing programs (Gubits et al. 2016).

For this evaluation, records were examined for a total of 270 households who participated in Bright Futures between 2011 and 2017 and for 42 households that received a Housing Choice Voucher through the Sioux Falls Housing and Redevelopment Commission during the same period and met the screening criteria outlined above. For further description of the two groups, see Section 2. Data and Methodology.

Unlike Bright Futures, where participation is limited to a maximum of two years, Housing Choice Vouchers do not have a time limit. In order to compare pre and post scores for Bright Futures participants and the comparison group, an artificial “exit” date was constructed for comparison group members: their status at exit was assessed at their two-year annual recertification (or, in the case of households terminated before two years, at the time of termination).

¹⁰ Project-based transitional housing differs from Bright Futures in that participants are required to live on-site. Bright Futures, by contrast, is a scattered-site transitional housing program that allows participants to choose their own apartment in the community.

Outcomes and Duration

Compared to the comparison group, Bright Futures had a higher rate of terminations and voluntary drops, which is to be expected given its more stringent program rules and participation requirements. However, Bright Futures participants were also more likely to become stable and self-sufficient. About 38% of Bright Futures participants graduated from the program within 24 months stable and self-sufficient or improved (Table 26).¹¹

By comparison, none of the comparison group members achieved self-sufficiency within 24 months: 44% with known outcomes were terminated, dropped, or deceased before 24 months, and another 55% held vouchers for more than 24 months—including 3 who were eventually terminated and 13 who still have vouchers.¹²

Table 26. Outcome after 24 months for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Bright Futures		Comparison Group	
	n	%	n	%
<u>Outcomes before 24 months</u>				
Graduate, self-sufficient/improved	67	38.3	-	-
<i>Voluntary drop</i>	40	22.9	4	13.8
<i>Terminated</i>	68	38.9	8	27.6
<i>Deceased</i>	-	-	1	3.5
<u>Outcomes after 24 months</u>				
Still has voucher	-	-	13	44.8
<i>Drop/terminated after 24 months</i>	-	-	3	10.3
Total	175		29	

Time in the program

Comparison group members spend significantly longer on a voucher than Bright Futures participants do in Bright Futures ($p < .0001$). On average Bright Futures participants spend about 8 months in the program compared to an average of 20.6 months with a voucher for members of the comparison group (Table 27).¹³

¹¹ Although Bright Futures only provides rental assistance for up to 24 months, the program's definition of stable and self-sufficient does not preclude the use of other types of housing assistance after graduation. However, it is uncommon for Bright Futures participants to receive a housing voucher at exit. As reported above, only 8 of 159 Bright Futures participants were found to have left the program with a housing voucher: 5 of 59 graduates and 3 of 38 voluntary drops. The number who move to project-based housing is unknown.

¹² There is no indication that any of the comparison group members were terminated or dropped because they became self-sufficient.

¹³ Length of time with a voucher for comparison group members is an underestimate because 13 voucher holders have had vouchers for more than 2 years and continue to hold them; total duration is unknown. The observed 20.6 months is also much shorter than average time with a voucher for the Housing Choice Voucher program as a whole

Table 27. Average duration of enrollment (in months) for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Mean	SD	n
Comparison Group	20.6	6.2	29
Bright Futures	8.0	5.6	170

Employment

Compared to comparison group members, Bright Futures participants are more likely to be employed at both entry and exit. At entry, 34.0% of Bright Futures participants were unemployed, compared to 71.4% of comparison group members ($\chi^2(3)=18.4339$, $p<.001$). At exit, 33.3% of Bright Futures participants were unemployed, compared to 64.3% of comparison group members ($\chi^2(4)=98.9300$, $p<.001$).

Bright Futures participants' higher employment rate at exit is not simply due to having a higher employment rate at entry. In fact, for Bright Futures participants, employment at entry is not significantly associated with employment at exit, but for comparison group members it is ($\chi^2(6)=27.119$, $p<.001$). In other words, for the comparison group, employment status is stagnant: people who enter unemployed tend to remain unemployed at exit. Bright Futures participants see more change in employment status during program participation, suggesting the program has a causal effect on employment changes.

Within the first two years after receiving a voucher, 57.1% of comparison group members remain unemployed, compared to 13.8% of Bright Futures participants. During the same period, 35.7% of comparison group members gained employment or remained employed, compared to 66.7% of Bright Futures participants (Table 28).

Logistic regression (in which employment status at exit was recoded as a dummy variable, 1=employed) finds that the odds of a Bright Futures participant being employed at exit are 3.6 times the odds of a comparison group member being employed at exit ($n=166$, 95% CI 1.54 – 8.42, $p=.003$).

Table 28. Change in employment from entry to exit for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Gained Employment	Remained Employed	Remained Unemployed	Lost Employment
Bright Futures (n=138)	28 (20.3%)	64 (46.4%)	19 (13.8%)	27 (19.6%)
Comparison Group (n=28)	4 (14.3%)	6 (21.4%)	16 (57.1%)	2 (7.1%)

Annual earnings from wages

Bright Futures participants enter and exit with significantly higher wages than comparison group members. At entry, Bright Futures participants earn an average of \$8,068 more annually than do comparison group members ($t=4.5718$, $p<.0001$).¹⁴ At exit, Bright Futures participants earn an average of \$10,220 more than do comparison group members ($t=4.3868$, $p<.0001$).

¹⁴ Bright Futures wages at entry could overestimate baseline earnings from Bright Futures participants. Case note review suggests it is not uncommon for Bright Futures participants to meet with a case manager several times before

Whereas Bright Futures participants show a significant increase in earnings from wages from entry to exit, comparison group members show no significant change (Table 30). Bright Futures participants overall gain an average of \$3,571 in annual earnings from wages between entry and exit, leaving with annual average earnings of \$13,388 (Table 29).

Table 29. Mean annual earnings from wages at entry and exit for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Bright Futures	\$9,817	\$8,403	128	\$13,388	\$11,087	128
Comparison Group	\$1,749	\$4,537	24	\$3,168	\$6,052	24

Table 30. Results of one-tailed t-tests for annual wages at entry and exit

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
	Bright Futures	\$3,571	\$1,058	128	\$1,477	\$5,664	3.37***
Comparison Group	\$1,419	\$913	24	\$-470	\$3,308	1.55	23

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Housing stability

Relative to the comparison group, Bright Futures participants enter and exit with lower levels of rental assistance. At entry, Bright Futures participants receive on average \$238.74 less per month in rental assistance than do comparison group members (t=5.4391, p<.0001). At exit, Bright Futures participants receive on average \$222.37 less (t=4.2016, p<.0001).

As with change in annual earnings from wages, Bright Futures participants saw a significant decrease in level of rental assistance from program entry to exit, whereas comparison group members did not see a significant difference (Table 32).

Table 31. Mean monthly rental assistance at entry and exit for Bright Futures and comparison group

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Bright Futures	\$504.57	\$205.08	128	\$445.98	\$251.11	128
Comparison Group	\$743.31	\$247.80	29	\$668.34	\$283.90	29

receiving rental assistance (the official enrollment date used in this evaluation), and during those initial visits, case managers encourage and facilitate employment search. As a result, Bright Futures participants may begin a job immediately before enrolling, but have had no earnings from wages immediately prior.

Table 32. Results of one-tailed t-tests for monthly rental assistance at entry and exit

	Mean		n	95% CI for mean		t	df
	difference	SE		difference			
Bright Futures	\$58.59	\$19.95	128	\$19.11	\$98.08	2.94**	127
Comparison Group	\$74.97	\$52.69	29	\$-32.97	\$182.90	1.42	28

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Successful Bright Futures Graduates

Comparisons between Bright Futures participants and comparison group members are based on results for all Bright Futures participants, regardless of whether they successfully graduated from Bright Futures, dropped out voluntarily, or were terminated from the program. This comparison tests for the effects of “intent to treat.” This type of analysis takes into account factors such as difficulty adhering to the program and overall rates of termination and drop-out. It asks whether—even with normal levels of termination and drop-out—Bright Futures still has an overall effect on those who enter the program.

An alternative analysis might consider the effect of “treatment on the treated” or “per protocol” treatment, i.e., the effect of Bright Futures on those who successfully complete the full program (graduates). This type of analysis imagines an ideal implementation of the program where everyone is able to follow through on program requirements to successful graduation. It may not be realistic to expect these outcomes in practice, but they suggest the potential of Bright Futures if ways could be found to reduce terminations and drop-outs.

A treatment on the treated analysis was conducted, comparing outcomes for Bright Futures graduates with the comparison group.

Employment (graduates)

Compared to comparison group members, Bright Futures graduates are more likely to be employed at both entry and exit. At entry, 19.7% of Bright Futures graduates were unemployed, compared to 71.4% of comparison group members ($\chi^2(3)=34.0165$, $p<.001$). At exit, 3.4% of Bright Futures graduates were unemployed, compared to 64.3% of comparison group members ($\chi^2(3)=75.4535$, $p<.001$).

As with Bright Futures participants overall, graduates’ higher employment rate at exit is not simply due to having a higher employment rate at entry. In fact, for Bright Futures graduates, employment at entry is not significantly associated with employment at exit, but for comparison group members it is ($\chi^2(6)=27.119$, $p<.001$). In other words, despite entering with a relatively low unemployment rate, Bright Futures graduates see more change in employment status during program participation than do comparison group members, suggesting the program has a causal effect on employment changes for graduates.

Within the first two years after receiving a voucher, 57.1% of comparison group members remain unemployed, compared to 0% of Bright Futures graduates. During the same period, 35.7% of comparison group members gained employment or remained employed, compared to 96.9% of Bright Futures graduates (Table 33).

Logistic regression (in which employment status at exit was recoded as a dummy variable, 1=employed) finds that the odds of a Bright Futures graduate being employed at exit are 50.4 times the odds of a comparison group member being employed at exit (n=86, 95% CI 10.09 – 251.73, p<.001).

Table 33. Change in employment from entry to exit for Bright Futures graduates and comparison group

	<u>Gained Employment</u>	<u>Remained Employed</u>	<u>Remained Unemployed</u>	<u>Lost Employment</u>
Bright Futures graduates (n=58)	11 (19.0%)	45 (77.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.4%)
Comparison Group (n=28)	4 (14.3%)	6 (21.4%)	16 (57.1%)	2 (7.1%)

Annual earnings from wages (graduates)

Bright Futures graduates enter and exit with significantly higher wages than comparison group members. At entry, Bright Futures graduates earn an average of \$11,078 more annually than do comparison group members (t=6.3161, p<.0001). At exit, Bright Futures graduates earn an average of \$19,359 more than do comparison group members (t=4.4975, p<.0001).

Whereas Bright Futures graduates show a significant increase in earnings from wages from entry to exit, comparison group members show no significant change (Table 34). Bright Futures graduates gain an average of \$9,699 in annual earnings from wages between entry and exit, leaving with annual average earnings of \$22,527 (Table 35).

Table 34. Mean annual earnings from wages at entry and exit for Bright Futures graduates and comparison group

	<u>Entry</u>			<u>Exit</u>		
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Bright Futures graduates	\$12,828	\$8,012	53	\$22,527	\$6,126	53
Comparison Group	\$1,749	\$4,537	24	\$3,168	\$6,052	24

Table 35. Results of one-tailed t-tests for annual wages at entry and exit

	<u>Mean difference</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>95% CI for mean difference</u>		<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>
Bright Futures graduates	\$9,699	\$1,239	53	\$7,214	\$12,185	7.83***	52
Comparison Group	\$1,419	\$913	24	\$-470	\$3,308	1.55	23

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

Housing stability (graduates)

Relative to the comparison group, Bright Futures graduates enter and exit with lower levels of rental assistance. At entry, Bright Futures graduates receive on average \$284.55 less per month in rental assistance than do comparison group members (t=6.0554, p<.0001). At exit, Bright Futures graduates receive on average \$361.17 less (t=6.1508, p<.0001).

As with change in annual earnings from wages, Bright Futures graduates saw a significant decrease in level of rental assistance from program entry to exit, whereas comparison group members did not see a significant difference (Table 37).

Table 36. Mean monthly rental assistance at entry and exit for Bright Futures graduates and comparison group

	Entry			Exit		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Bright Futures graduates	\$458.76	\$171.16	51	\$307.18	\$233.03	51
Comparison Group	\$743.31	\$247.80	29	\$668.34	\$283.90	29

Table 37. Results of one-tailed t-tests for monthly rental assistance at entry and exit

	Mean difference	SE	n	95% CI for mean difference		t	df
Bright Futures graduates	\$151.59	\$30.40	51	\$90.53	\$212.65	4.99***	50
Comparison Group	\$74.97	\$52.69	29	\$-32.97	\$182.90	1.42	28

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

7. SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Program Cost

Compared to other documented costs for transitional housing programs, Bright Futures operates at a lower cost per household. From FY2012 through the end of FY2017, Bright Futures has served 175 enrolled households at an average daily cost for rental assistance plus services of \$32.78, with an average 8-month stay or about \$7,702 per household per stay. By comparison, between 1987 and 1990, Matulef et al. (1995) found that the average daily cost of shelter plus services in transitional housing was \$96 per household, with an average 9-month stay or about \$27,000 per household per stay.¹⁵

Bright Futures also operates at a lower cost than the comparison group, which received permanent vouchers for rental assistance. On average, comparison group members received rental assistance of \$743/month at entry and saw no significant change over the following 24 months (see Table 31 and Table 32). Comparison group members averaged 20.6 months with a voucher.¹⁶ For the comparison group, total expenditure per family for time in the program is about \$15,312. Even if Bright Futures participants only obtained the *same* outcomes as the comparison group, Bright Futures might be considered a more cost effective intervention. However, this evaluation suggests Bright Futures participants in fact see comparative benefits.

Table 38 shows the average cost per client for Bright Futures, adjusting for the different amount of time spent in the program for households with different outcomes. The table also shows an additional 58 households that received short-term case management but never received rental assistance through Bright Futures and ultimately did not enroll in the program.¹⁷

As previously noted, only about 38.3% of Bright Futures participants ultimately graduate from the program. Taking into account the cost of serving participants who do not enroll or do not graduate, the cost to produce one graduate household is about \$20,118.

Table 38. Bright Futures program cost by participant outcome

	Clients	Average months	Client-months	Average cost per client	Total cost
Graduate	67	10.3	690.1	\$ 9,441.54	\$ 632,583.07
Voluntary drop	40	7.9	352	\$ 7,241.57	\$ 289,662.73
Terminated	68	5.7	408	\$ 5,224.93	\$ 355,295.17
Did not enroll	58	0.7	58	\$ 225.00	\$ 13,049.74
Total	233				\$1,347,882.75

Note: Cost estimates are based on contract totals from 8/1/2011 to 7/31/2017 for Bright Futures case management (\$455,425.75) and TBRA (\$863,146.00) plus ICAP funds expended to support Bright Futures case management (\$29,311.00).

¹⁵ Costs are adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) and reported in 2017 dollars. Matulef et al. reported daily costs at \$53 per household and cost per stay at \$15,000 in 1991 dollars.

¹⁶ Likely an underestimate. See Section 6, subsection on Time in the program.

¹⁷ Costs for these 58 households are based on the cost of case management only. Costs for all other households include case management and rental assistance. The estimated cost per enrolled participant (\$7,702 per stay) takes into account the cost of serving families who do not enroll.

Program Benefits

Table 39 summarizes estimated benefits realized by Bright Futures participants overall and for graduates specifically based on pre-post analysis (i.e., change from entry into the program to exit). The table includes only those benefits found to be statistically significant.

In addition to the benefits recorded in the table, the follow-up survey of past participants suggests that Bright Futures graduates not only maintain increases in employment and income, but also see long-term benefits in education level, reduced receipt of public assistance, increased food security, and improvements in children’s academic achievement, school attendance and stability, and behavior.

Table 39. Summary of Bright Futures program benefits

	Pre-post Difference (all participants)	Pre-post Difference (graduates)
Fulltime employment rate (percentage point change)	+22.2	+47.4
Gained/remained employed (% of group)	67.1%	96.9%
Earnings from wages (annual)	+\$3,571	+\$9,699
Income including rental assistance (annual)	+\$2,974	+\$8,423
Rental assistance	-\$58.59	-\$151.59

Estimated Social Return on Investment

On average, the net present value of an initial \$7,702 investment in a Bright Futures participant is \$54,786, based on expected additional earnings from wages over the participant’s lifetime. In terms of the ratio of benefits to costs, every dollar invested in Bright Futures is expected to return \$8.36.

Because graduates see larger benefits than participants on average, the net present value of the per graduate investment is also larger—even after taking into account the higher initial investment.¹⁸ The net present value of an initial \$20,118 investment per Bright Futures graduate is \$149,576, based on expected additional earnings from wages over the graduate’s lifetime. The benefit-to-cost ratio is 8.70, meaning

¹⁸ The per-graduate initial investment is higher because it includes the cost of serving participants who do not graduate. That is, to calculate the per-graduate investment, the total cost of the Bright Futures program is averaged across graduates alone.

that, looking at the benefit to graduates alone, every dollar invested in Bright Futures is expected to return \$8.70.¹⁹

Table 40. Social return on investment based on estimated pre-post effects on annual earnings from wages

	Net Present Value (low, high)	Benefit-to-Cost Ratio (low, high)
Per participant	\$54,786 (\$18,296, \$91,258)	8.36 (3.46, 13.26)
Per graduate	\$149,576 (\$106,273, \$192,897)	8.70 (6.47, 10.92)

Social return on investment (SROI) is estimated conservatively using only the observed effect on annual earnings from wages. Other benefits are excluded because they are derivative of or closely tied to changes in earnings (e.g., employment status and level of rental assistance). The SROI estimate also excludes additional benefits that, given the sample size and data available for this evaluation, could not be estimated with precision. A more comprehensive accounting of the SROI would include, for instance, the estimated economic impact of long-term changes in parents’ education levels and children’s school outcomes.

Consequently, the SROI estimated here focuses on household-level returns. Note that, in terms of benefits to the individual, changes in annual earnings from wages may be partially offset by reductions in means-tested benefits. However, this evaluation finds that, even with this tradeoff, Bright Futures participants still see a net increase in total annual income. Even assuming no change in total income (i.e., a one-to-one tradeoff between earned income and means-tested benefits), the composition of an individual’s income stream would shift toward earned income over public assistance. In either scenario, added benefit accrues to the community as individual income shifts toward a higher proportion of earned income and lower proportion of public assistance.

The SROI is estimated as the net present value and benefit-to-cost ratio per Bright Futures participant. Net present value can be interpreted as the lifetime return on a one-time investment in a Bright Futures participant. Net present value is calculated as the average benefit per household minus the average cost per household summed over 30 years assuming an annual discount rate of 3.5%. The discount rate accounts for the fact that, as participants spend more time away from the Bright Futures program, any effects on wages may diminish.

¹⁹ Some degree of attrition is expected in a transitional housing program such as Bright Futures, and it is unlikely the program could screen applicants with 100% accuracy to select only those who would graduate—nor is it clear that such screening would be appropriate or desirable from a mission standpoint. However, as a thought experiment, social return on investment can be calculated for graduates alone, assuming all participants successfully graduated and none were terminated or dropped voluntarily. If that were the case, and assuming length of time to graduation and benefits to graduates remained constant, the per-participant cost would be \$9,441.54, and the net present value of that per-participant investment would be \$159,891.17 (95% CI: \$116,587.91, \$203,211.87). The benefit-to-cost ratio would be 18.53 (95% CI: 13.78, 23.28).

Benefit-to-cost ratio can be interpreted as the return per dollar invested in Bright Futures. The benefit-to-cost ratio is calculated as the ratio of the average benefit per household over 30 years (discounted at 3.5%) divided by the initial investment (i.e., average per-participant cost for Bright Futures).

Estimates are provided for participants overall and for graduates alone. SROI for participants overall is based on an initial investment of \$7,702.19 per participant and a mean increase in annual earnings from wages of \$3,571. SROI for graduates alone is based on an initial investment of \$20,117.65 per graduate and a mean increase in annual earnings from wages of \$9,699.

Sensitivity testing is conducted by estimating a minimum and maximum SROI using the lower and upper bounds of a 95% confidence interval around the average benefit per client. These values are used to calculate low and high estimates for net present value and benefit-to-cost ratio. The low and high estimates reflect variability in the size of the effect Bright Futures has on participant outcomes.

Comparative Social Return on Investment

As described in Section 2. Data and Methodology, pre-post estimates may be subject to error because they cannot account for confounding factors, such as changes in a community's labor market. To test for the possibility that Bright Futures benefits were due to confounding factors rather than the program itself, change in annual earnings from wages was examined using difference-in-difference analysis, a quasi-experimental method that controls for unobservable and time invariant characteristics between groups.

In essence, difference-in-difference compares the difference observed for Bright Futures participants (the experimental group) at program entry and program exit to the difference observed for comparison group members on the same outcome at entry and exit. If Bright Futures participants show greater difference in the outcome, it would suggest that the program has a causal effect on that outcome over and above background or community-level changes, since those external forces would have been experienced by members of the comparison group as well.

Table 41 presents the results of a comparative SROI based on the difference-in-difference of annual earnings from wages for Bright Futures participants and comparison group members.

For Bright Futures participants overall, estimates are based on a difference-in-difference effect of \$2,152 on annual earnings from wages—the increase seen by Bright Futures participants over and above any increase seen by comparison group members. For Bright Futures graduates, the observed difference-in-difference was \$8,281.

In this evaluation, comparison group members—like Bright Futures participants—received rental assistance. The comparative SROI estimates in Table 41 adjust for the cost of providing rental assistance to the comparison group versus providing rental assistance with case management to Bright Futures participants by estimating Bright Futures investments as the cost of case management alone. For participants overall, cost is estimated as \$2,769.92, which represents the average per-participant cost of case management in Bright Futures, excluding spending on rental assistance. For graduates alone, cost is estimated at \$7,234.88.

As with the previous SROI estimates, sensitivity analysis is conducted by estimating a low and high net present value and benefit-to-cost ratio based on a 95% confidence interval around the difference-in-difference estimates.

The net present values and benefit-to-cost ratios presented in Table 41 can be interpreted as the SROI for adding case management on top of rental assistance. For participants overall, an initial per-participant investment of \$2,769.92 in case management has a net present value of \$34,824, based on expected additional earnings from wages over the participant’s lifetime. For graduates alone, an initial per-graduate investment of \$7,234.88 in case management (higher because it includes the cost of serving non-graduates) has a net present value of \$137,313, based on expected additional earnings from wages over the graduate’s lifetime.

The benefit-to-cost ratio of investing in case management is 14.01 for participants and 20.64 for graduates. In other words, every dollar invested in case management (on top of rental assistance) returns an expected \$14.01 in benefits to participants overall, and \$20.64 in benefits considering graduates alone.

The higher benefit-to-cost ratio compared to those presented in the previous section reflects the fact that case management has a relatively low additional cost when added on top of rental assistance.

Table 41. Comparative SROI for difference-in-difference effects on annual earnings from wages

	Net Present Value (low, high)	Benefit-to-Cost Ratio (low, high)
Per participant	\$34,824 (-\$13,298, \$82,943)	14.01 (-3.97, 31.99)
Per graduate	\$137,313 (\$83,903, \$190,724)	20.64 (13.00, 28.1028)

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This evaluation provides a retrospective account of pre- and post-program outcomes for Bright Futures participants. The survey results presented in Section 5. Bright Futures Long-term Outcomes are suggestive of long-term outcomes of the program. However, further evaluation is necessary to determine whether Bright Futures participants maintain progress made during the program over the long term.

The following recommendations are made in order to facilitate future evaluation and internal monitoring of outcomes for continuous quality improvement of the Bright Futures program:

Seek participant consent at entry. At entry, participants should be asked to authorize release of their program-related information for research and evaluation. A prospective release would facilitate future evaluation and reduce the burden of locating past participants. Agreeing to the release should be voluntary, and participation in the program should not be conditioned on agreeing to release information.

Collect more detailed information at exit. Case managers should perform exit interviews or evaluations for all participants (using last known status to complete proxy evaluations for any participants who cannot be reached at time of exit). These exit interviews would offer an opportunity to collect more detailed information at exit in order to compare to the information already available from application materials at entry. In particular, the following data should be considered for collection at exit:

- Income by source, including wages and benefits
- Employment status and job type
- Current rent and level of rental assistance
- Housing plans after exit (e.g., whether participant will transition in place, receive rental assistance, move into subsidized housing, etc.)
- Changes in education level since entering the program

Conduct regular follow-up. Program staff should develop a process for conducting regular follow-up check-ins with past clients (e.g., every 6 months or annually for at least 1 year following exit). Ideally, follow-up would be conducted with all participants, regardless of outcome at exit. To encourage participation in follow-up, inform participants from time of enrollment that they can expect to receive follow-up calls, and consider offering an incentive to encourage participation.

Consider implementing a randomized controlled trial. Randomized controlled trials are the gold standard for evaluation. They offer the most definitive test of causality and overcome many of the limitations of observational and retrospective studies. However, they are expensive and time consuming, and they require developing a protocol to randomly assign participants to treatment and control groups—that is, to randomly accept or not accept participants into the Bright Futures program. In the case of social programs such as Bright Futures, random assignment may be counter to program goals. Program administrators should consider the costs and benefits of implementing a randomized controlled trial.

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