

Long term earnings and disability program participation outcomes of the Bridges transition program

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Abstract.

BACKGROUND: The Bridges from School to Work (Bridges) program provides job placement and supports for youth with disabilities. Operating in nine sites across the country, over 18,000 youth have received job placement services through Bridges.

OBJECTIVE: The paper presents long-term outcomes of youth who participate in the study to determine if previously documented short-term outcomes continue into adulthood.

METHODS: We examine the earnings of Bridges participants up to age 30. We present longitudinal statistics on the earnings and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) program participation of youth placed by Bridges into a job. A comparison with similarly aged youths receiving SSI who did not participate in Bridges is also made.

RESULTS: At age 30, almost three quarters of youth placed by Bridges have earnings. We also find that SSI participation declines through age 30 and DI participation increases. Among placed youth who received SSI at the time of Bridges enrollment, half have earnings at age 30 and less than half received SSI payments; however, over one quarter receive DI benefits.

CONCLUSIONS: Bridges participation potentially helps create a higher earnings capacity for participants; however, more research is necessary to establish a causal effect.

Keywords: Transition, employment outcomes, Supplemental Security Income, school-to-work, youth

1. Introduction

A substantial body of research has long shown that youth with disabilities have a difficult time transitioning into adulthood (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Osgood, Foster, & Courney, 2007; Newman et al., 2011). In addition to the usual difficulties associated with becoming an adult, youth with disabilities often age out of a support system serving them primarily in the educational system (Aron & Loprest,

2007; Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2012; Wittenburg, Golden, & Fishman, 2002; Wittenburg & Maag, 2002). As the responsibility for obtaining needed services shifts away from the schools to the youth (or their family), many youth lose or have difficulty receiving services (GAO, 2012; Newman et al., 2011), which may interfere with youths' abilities to successfully enter the labor market. Further, many youth with disabilities also come from poorer households with limited exposure to the variety of careers that may be available to them (Osgood et al., 2007). As a result, many youth with disabilities have little or no earnings as adults, relying on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) programs.

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In order to improve the adult outcomes for youth with disabilities, Federal and state agencies have developed policies and programs to ease the transition into adult employment. The Social Security Administration (SSA), for example, fielded its Youth Transition Demonstration to determine if interventions and program waivers at ages 14 to 25 help reduce dependence on its disability programs, with mixed results on employment outcomes (Fraker, 2013). The Department of Labor and the Department of Education also have programs that can, but often do not exclusively, serve youth with disabilities. These include the federal-state partner program of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and state programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Workforce Investment Act. Some of these programs, like the Department of Labor's High School/High Tech program, rely on community and provider partnerships. Individual states have also implemented transition strategies to help youth successfully enter employment or post-secondary education, such as the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative (Luecking & Luecking, 2013).

Several non-profit and private programs (including university-based programs) have developed to help youth with disabilities achieve success in the labor market as well, such as the Career Transition Program in Maryland (Fraker et al., 2012) and Project SEARCH programs around the country (Müller & VanGilder, 2014; Rutkowski, Daston, Van Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006). See Luecking (2009) for descriptions of similar programs. Some of these programs focus on providing direct employment services such as job shadowing, resume writing support, and job coaching. Others provide youth with case management to help navigate the various public and private programs for which they are eligible.

One such private program is the *Bridges from School to Work* (Bridges) program. Since 1989, the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD) has operated Bridges to connect and support youth with disabilities and employers to establish competitive employment relationships. The program is grounded in matching the skills and interests of the youth with the key success factors of the job. To date, Bridges has worked almost exclusively with youth in urban center settings, many of whom also face significant socioeconomic challenges. One area for which there is an acknowledged lack of information is on longitudinal data on post-school outcomes for youth (National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, 2010). In this paper, we present longitudinal statistics on the

earnings and SSI and DI program participation of youth placed by Bridges into a job up to age 30.

To better understand the context of Bridges, we also provide a comparison of youth placed by Bridges who received SSI at age 17 and youth on the SSI program at age 17 during the observation period who were not served by Bridges and lived in the ZIP codes of Bridges-served youth. The SSI comparison group may or may not have had the opportunity to participate in Bridges (e.g., were unaware of Bridges, were screened out by Bridges, had transportation difficulty, etc.). Although the differences are not necessarily due to Bridges participation, we hypothesize that the SSI comparison group will have worse outcomes than the Bridges group due to the lack of Bridges services (although they may have received other services or not required any services) and because Bridges participants are likely to be more motivated or able to work than their non-participating peers.

2. Programs for youth

Several programs exist to serve youth with disabilities as they transition into adulthood. These range from the various state VR programs serving thousands of youth a year to smaller non-profit programs serving a few youth at a time. Many programs focus on non-employment-related outcomes such as interpersonal skills and self-determination. Cobb, Allwell, and colleagues have conducted extensive literature reviews of these transition interventions (Allwell & Cobb, 2009a, 2009b; Cobb & Allwell, 2009; Cobb et al., 2009). In general, they found limited evidence of effectiveness for social and communicative interventions and functional life skills curricular interventions (although perhaps due to limited studies on these topics) and positive effects of multicomponent self-determination interventions and student-focused interventions. The studies they reviewed, however, did not generally explore post-secondary employment outcomes.

Studies of employment outcomes of youths generally find that programs focusing on early work experiences are key to post-secondary employment (see, for example, Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Kohler, 1993; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Luecking, 2009; Test et al., 2009; Wittenburg & Maag, 2002). However, most of these programs have either relied on self-reported survey responses for outcomes or on administrative data for a limited follow-up period. For example, vocational rehabilitation only tracks individuals for 90 days after

case closure and the Bridges program itself typically only follows up with a youth for one year after placement.

Luecking (2009) argues that programs that focus on employment, like Bridges, give youth the opportunity to identify their interests and goals, develop employment skills, understand the relationship between work and education, and gain an understanding of employer expectations, among other things. In addition to these individual gains relative to employment viability, there are potential public benefits to these programs too. Successful programs will ultimately reduce or eliminate the need for these youth to receive public disability benefits (e.g., SSI) or other welfare benefits (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), reducing the strain on public budgets. There is limited evidence of the impact of these programs on public expenditures.¹

2.1. The Bridges program

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities was established in 1989 by the family of the founder of Marriott International to enhance employment opportunity for youth with disabilities. To that end, the foundation developed the Bridges program and has implemented it in cities around the country since 1990. At the outset, Bridges delivered services during a 3 to 6 month interface with each youth. Initially, the program's objectives were the establishment of a short-term paid internship for each youth in order to provide a 'real work' experience, with the hope that a significant number of those internships would lead to ongoing employment. Today the program typically interfaces with participating youth for 15 to 24 months and seeks to develop permanent, competitive placements incorporating individual career development plans with the potential for quantifiable vocational advancement (i.e., promotions and pay raises).

Bridges targets youth between 17 and 22 years old; additionally, youth must have a documented disability (from state VR agencies, an individualized education plan, or a medical professional) and have evidence of United States citizenship. Bridges partners with, and recruits youth primarily from, school systems, workforce agencies, and VR. The typical youth begins receiving services in their last year of high school or soon thereafter.

Approximately 90 percent of the youth served by Bridges are members of a racial or ethnic minority group. Urban ethnic minority youth with disabilities often deal with complicated issues, related to living in poverty, that influence their ability to find and retain employment (Fabian, 2007). The Bridges model incorporates supports – both job specific support and off-site work support – that have been shown to predict higher employment retention for these youth (Garcia-Iriate, Balacazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2007).

To better understand the Bridges' model, we briefly summarize the description provided by Tilson, Luecking, and Donovan (1994) and Gold, Fabian, and Luecking (2013). (See also Tilson & Simonsen (2013) for a description of the personal attributes of Bridges staff.) According to Tilson, Luecking, and Donovan (1994), "The only criteria for selection into the program are a consistent and demonstrated interest in participating fully and a schedule that can accommodate working." (p. 80). After acceptance into the program, youth and parents receive orientation about the program. As necessary, employers are also provided information and coaching on disability and workplace issues, such as accommodations. Participating youth are screened by Bridges staff (Employer Representatives) to identify their skills, interests, and other characteristics that are then matched to available positions. Bridges staff also work with the employers and the youth to help identify appropriate employment arrangements for youth that do not easily match readily available positions. The Bridges staff then provide continued job support to the youth (and employer) to ensure a successful work experience.

The program's first site opened in 1990 and Bridges has since expanded to 9 sites across the U.S., in major metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and the Washington D.C. area²). Bridges is funded through MFPD and a variety of grants, contributions, and donations. More than 18,000 youth have now participated in the program with approximately 75 percent of them placed into competitive employment with some 3,500 different employers that have partnered with Bridges to meet their hiring needs. The employers are a diverse representation of the overall labor market and range from small, local businesses to national and inter-

¹SSA's Youth Transition Demonstration will include a cost-benefit analysis incorporating public expenditures.

²Additional sites identified in this study were in Fairfax County, Virginia and New Orleans, Louisiana. These sites were short term and served few youth. Baltimore is a relatively recent addition and no data were available for that site at the time the data were analyzed.

national corporations. The program also partners with organizations that assist people with disabilities to enter the workforce, including the local school districts.

As the program has evolved, two key underlying tenets have remained constant:

- Bridges is an employer driven program, giving priority to the needs of the employer in all employment related activities. This priority is rooted in the sense that any employment relationship that does not fully meet the needs of the employer is unlikely to endure.
- Bridges focuses on the skills, interests and abilities of the youth it serves, not on their disabilities.

Bridges operates with the assumption that every youth with a disability has the potential to be a capable employee, but that this potential can only be fully realized if several conditions are met:

- Both the workplace and the youth must be ready and willing to make the placement work.
- The job match must be right; the skills and interests of the youth must match the critical needs of the job.
- Appropriate supports must be available, especially early in the employment relationship, to maintain its success.

Each of the current program's components seek to address one or more of these conditions. Services include informal skills assessment and job analysis, career planning, job development, placement and follow-up support. The focus is to provide the support necessary to increase the likelihood of long-term employment success after job placement. Program activities and youth progress are tracked through a web-based data management system, which includes records for every youth who has been enrolled in Bridges.

Other studies have looked at different aspects of the Bridges program using its program data. For example, Fabian (2007) examined the factors associated with successful job placement available in the Bridges data. Of particular interest to the current study, she found that the receipt of SSI was a strong negative predictor of future employment for Bridges participants. Fabian, Lent, and Willis (1998) looked at Bridges' use of internships, finding that those who completed Bridges were more likely to accept a job after the program. Luecking and Fabian (2000) looked at employment in the program's 6, 12, and 18 month follow-up data, finding differences by disability type. Recently, Gold, Fabian, and Luecking

(2013) looked at site-level job placement by Bridges site from 2006–2011, finding that outcomes are responsive to the local setting and that placement was generally high for the served population in all settings. The current study expands these previous analyses by matching the Bridges' program data with SSA's administrative data to track individuals over a much longer follow-up period.

3. Data and methodology

Bridges maintains a database of all participants in the program. In addition to demographic information, the program records information related to career planning and goal setting, regular pre- and post-placement case notes, and placement information such as employer, job title, wages, benefits, and scheduled hours. Bridges also collects limited follow-up data one year after program completion.

We supplement this data with administrative data from SSA. We first validated the records to ensure names, dates of birth, and Social Security Numbers matched. For validated records (90 percent of the records provided by Bridges), we then matched SSI participation history from the Supplemental Security Record (SSR) and DI participation history from the Master Beneficiary Record (MBR), SSA's main data systems for the SSI and DI programs. We obtained dates of death from SSA's Numident file (which contains the death master index). Earnings are from SSA's Master Earnings File (MEF), which contains all taxable earnings recorded on an individual's W-2. All earnings were converted to 2009 dollars using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). Data from the SSR, MBR, and Numident were available through 2010 at the time the data was drawn for analysis; data from the MEF were available through 2009.

We limit the analysis population to youth enrolled between the ages of 16 and 23.³ Table 1 presents summary statistics on the youth in our sample. Roughly 37 percent of Bridges youth were age 18 at their enrollment in Bridges. Because they are the largest and/or earliest sites, most of the youth come from the Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, D. C. Metro areas. A large majority of Bridges youth are male and have an intel-

³Although Bridges targets youth ages 17 to 22, some youth outside this age range may have been entered in the system or have been included in the program for various reasons. We include youth ages 16 and 23 in our study, but the results are robust to their exclusion.

Table 1
 Démographie characteristics of ail placed Bridges participants and SSI comparison group

	Bridges Participants			SSI Comparison
	All	Not On SSI at Age 17	On SSI at Age 17	
Location				
Atlanta	14.7 (0.3)	14.8 (0.4)	14.4 (0.8)	9.7 (0.1)
Chicago	20.4 (0.4)	17.4 (0.4)	36.9 (1.2)	25.4 (0.2)
Dallas	2.5 (0.1)	2.4 (0.2)	3.3 (0.4)	6.2 (0.1)
Fairfax County (VA)	1.1 (0.1)	1.2 (0.1)	0.2 (0.1)	0.6 (0.0)
Los Angeles	17.9 (0.4)	19.5 (0.4)	9.6 (0.7)	19.7 (0.1)
New Orleans	0.1 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.3 (0.1)	4.5 (0.1)
Oakland	1.2 (0.1)	1.1 (0.1)	1.4 (0.3)	3.0 (0.1)
Philadelphia	8.0 (0.3)	6.9 (0.3)	13.7 (0.8)	18.4 (0.1)
San Francisco	16.2 (0.4)	18.1 (0.4)	6.2 (0.6)	4.6 (0.1)
Washington Metro	17.9 (0.4)	18.6 (0.4)	13.9 (0.8)	7.8 (0.1)
Disability				
Physical Disabilities	10.2 (0.3)	9.7 (0.3)	12.9 (0.8)	20.7 (0.1)
Intellectual, Developmental, and Mental Disabilities	89.8 (0.3)	90.3 (0.3)	87.1 (0.8)	79.3 (0.1)
Age at Bridges Enrollment				
16	2.6 (0.2)	2.8 (0.2)	1.3 (0.3)	–
17	20.6 (0.4)	21.0 (0.4)	18.8 (0.9)	–
18	37.3 (0.5)	38.1 (0.5)	33.2 (1.1)	–
19	24.4 (0.4)	24.2 (0.4)	25.4 (1.0)	–
20	9.6 (0.3)	9.0 (0.3)	12.9 (0.8)	–
21	3.5 (0.2)	3.1 (0.2)	5.6 (0.6)	–
22	1.5 (0.1)	1.4 (0.1)	2.4 (0.4)	–
23	0.5 (0.1)	0.6 (0.1)	0.4 (0.2)	–
Program				
Bridges	54.1 (0.5)	54.1 (0.5)	54.2 (1.2)	–
Bridges Plus	45.9 (0.5)	45.9 (0.5)	45.8 (1.2)	–
Neither	–	–	–	100.0
Sex				
Male	61.3 (0.5)	61.2 (0.5)	61.8 (1.2)	61.1 (0.2)
Female	38.7 (0.5)	38.8 (0.5)	38.2 (1.2)	38.9 (0.2)
Year of Bridges Enrollment				
1991–1995	15.8 (0.3)	17.0 (0.4)	9.9 (0.7)	–
1996–2000	23.7 (0.4)	23.3 (0.4)	25.5 (1.0)	–
2001–2005	27.5 (0.4)	27.4 (0.5)	28.5 (1.1)	–
2006–2010	33.0 (0.4)	32.3 (0.5)	36.0 (1.2)	–
Not Enrolled	–	–	–	100.0
Received SSI at Age 17				
Not on SSI at Age 17	84.3 (0.3)	100.0	–	–
On SSI at Age 17	15.7 (0.3)	–	100.0	100.0
N	11,067	9,321	1,734	78,313

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

lectual, developmental, or mental disability.⁴ Almost 46 percent of youths served by Bridges were served under the expanded Bridges Plus program, the version

⁴We group individuals into physical vs. intellectual, developmental, or mental disability categories to provide a comparable diagnostic group as is available from SSI program records. Intellectual, developmental, and mental disabilities include: Intellectual disabilities/mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, developmental delay, learning disabilities, and speech and language impairments.

of the program that gradually evolved from 1998 to 2005. Over half of the sample enrolled since 2001.

In this paper, we do not distinguish between the earlier and later Bridges models. The transition from the earlier model to the later model was gradual. All sites used the original Bridges model prior to July 1998 and the transition to the later model was complete as of September 2005. In exploratory work not presented in this paper we find noticeable differences in the SSI, DI, and earnings patterns of youth served under the

two models, with the later model having more positive results – higher earnings and lower disability program participation – at the ages common in the follow-up periods for both program models. We acknowledge that our longer-term outcomes reflect primarily the original Bridges model and we plan to examine these differences in future work.

Because Bridges is a voluntary program, we are unable to identify Bridges causal impact without a better understanding of who *does not* participate in the program. In keeping with the descriptive nature of this paper, we focus on youth placed by Bridges in a job at the end of the program. Including youth who were not placed (or a comparison with these youth) would not give an accurate account of what the program potentially offers since we do not observe why the youth dropped out (e.g., moved out of the area, personality conflicts, health reasons, lack of interest, etc.). Appendix A provides additional information on the 3,338 youths not placed by Bridges but otherwise met our analysis population inclusion criteria. We note that, while there are some differences (notably in sex and SSI status at age 17), the overall pattern is similar between the placed and non-placed participants.

While the percentage of youth served by Bridges who received SSI at age 17 is relatively small (fewer than 16 percent, Table 1), this population is likely among those most in need of Bridges services and include youths of particular interest to policy makers (Berry, Price-Ellingstad, Halloran, & Finch, 2000; Schuster, Timmons, & Moloney, 2003). To inform policy discussions on the transition outcomes of SSI youth, we also look at how this sub-sample of Bridges participants compares with their local peers who did not participate in Bridges, that is, non-participating youths in the ZIP codes served by Bridges who received SSI at age 17 during the study years (1991–2010). There are underlying selection issues into Bridges – Bridges youth on SSI at age 17 were more likely to have an intellectual, developmental, or mental disability than the SSI comparison group (Table 1). There is similar gender distribution, however.

Youths placed by Bridges who did not receive SSI at age 17 are broadly similar to youth who did receive SSI at age 17; however, they are less likely to be in Chicago or Philadelphia and more likely to be in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Additionally, non-SSI Bridges youths are also slightly more likely to have an intellectual, developmental, or mental disability and to have enrolled in the earliest Bridges cohorts.

We track earnings, SSI, and DI participation for up to age 30. We look at the following adult outcomes:

- any earnings;
- amount of earnings;
- any earnings above an annualized measure of SSA's level of substantial gainful activity (SGA)⁵, defined as 12 times the monthly SGA level;
- any earnings above the annual full-time federal minimum wage, defined as fifty 40-hour weeks work at the minimum wage;
- receipt of SSI; and
- receipt of DI.

We also compare cumulative SSI payments and DI benefits from age 18 through ages 20, 25, and 30. When comparing earnings to SGA and the minimum wage we compare nominal values for a given age-year.

Our tables intentionally do not present the differences in outcomes between the full Bridges analysis population, the Bridges SSI subpopulation, and the SSI comparison group. By doing so, we are implicitly calling attention to the fact that the differences between these populations are not causal. We caution the reader against interpreting the results in such a manner.

Because we track individuals who entered the program over almost two decades, our sample size drops substantially by age 30. For example, when considering youth placed by Bridges who received SSI payments at age 17, we have 1,600 youth at age 20 and only 457 at age 30. Some of these individuals die, but the reduction in population size is primarily due to right censoring – i.e., individuals enrolled in later years have not attained age 30. Thus, our measures become less precise at the older ages. This is of somewhat greater concern for our earnings measures because program data from the SSR and MBR are available for a longer period of time (through 2010, at the time of writing) than earnings data from the MEF (through 2009). We include individuals in our statistics for as long as we observe them; thus, the SSI and DI measures will have a higher population size than the earnings measures. We also note that, by definition, the individuals observed at older ages were served by Bridges early in its development and more recent cohorts may experience different results.

⁵SGA is the level of work activity SSA uses to define an individual's ability to work for eligibility purposes for DI and SSI. It is a monthly measure (\$980 in 2009). Working above SGA once receiving DI eventually ends DI eligibility. Working above SGA does not immediately affect SSI eligibility, but does affect the SSI payment amount—in general, payments are reduced \$1 for every \$2 earned above a \$65 monthly allowance. There are additional DI and SSI work incentives which reduce the amount of income counted for eligibility and payment purposes or otherwise allow people to remain DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients.

Finally, all analyses are limited to survivors at each age.

4. Results

4.1. How much do youth who complete Bridges earn?

We begin by presenting the mean earnings of our four groups: placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants who did not receive SSI at age 17, placed Bridges participants who received SSI at age 17, and the SSI recipient comparison group. Figure 1 shows the mean earnings of each group from age 16 through age 30 (recall that there are substantially fewer individuals at the older ages than at the younger ages). Average earnings of Bridges youth grow from about \$2,500 at age 18 to almost \$15,000 at age 30. The highest rate of growth (as evidenced by the steepness of the figure) appears to be from age 17 through age 20, with relatively flat earnings growth after age 28.

The earnings of Bridges youths who received SSI at age 17 are lower than the earnings of Bridges youth overall at every age. For Bridges youths who received SSI, earnings begin to flatten out around age 23, hovering around \$6,000 at older ages. The SSI comparison group has steady, but low, earnings growth through age

30; however, peak average earnings at age 30 are only about \$4,300.

The earnings of Bridges youths who did not receive SSI at age 17 follow a similar trajectory as the full Bridges sample, as would be expected of a group comprising 84 percent of the population. Additionally, earnings for those who did not receive SSI at age 17 are higher at every age than for those who did receive SSI at age 17, consistent with this group not having the accompanying work barriers most SSI recipients face. Because the statistics for the overall Bridges group and the non-SSI Bridges group are so similar, we do not discuss their results in detail in what follows. However, we do highlight some results.

We explore these earnings outcomes more thoroughly in Table 2 where we present the percent with earnings, mean earnings, and the percent with earnings above the annualized SGA level and above the annualized federal minimum wage level of earnings at ages 20, 25, and 30. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of placed Bridges youth have any earnings at each age than placed Bridges youth who received SSI at age 17 or the general SSI comparison group. The percent of Bridges youths with earnings declines at each subsequent age, and by age 30 about 73 percent have earnings. Comparatively, only about one-third of the SSI comparison group has earnings.

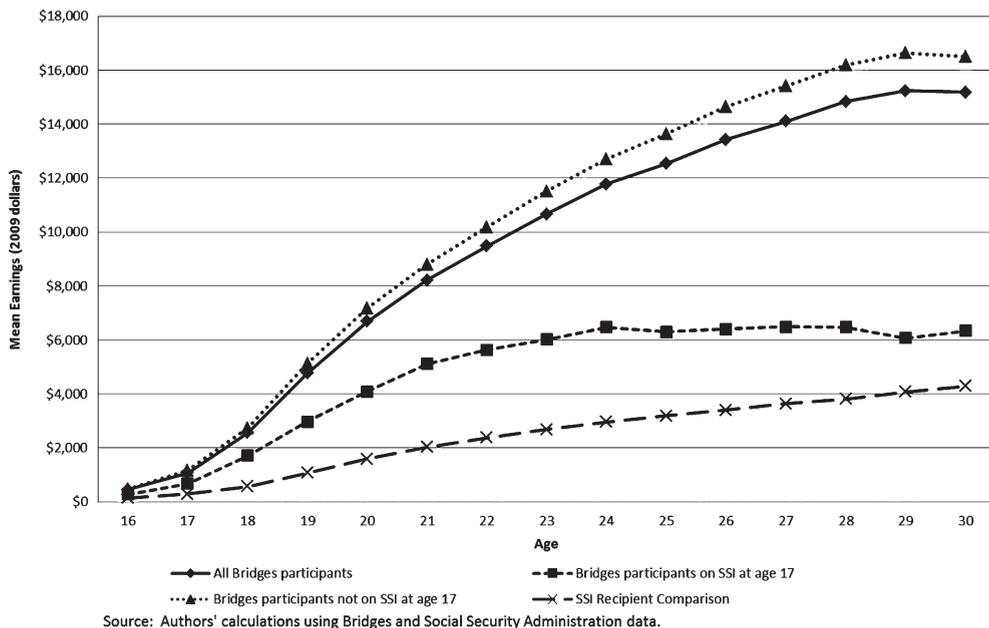


Fig. 1. Mean earnings of Bridges participants and SSI comparison group by age.

Table 2
Earnings of all placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants receiving SSI at age 17, and SSI comparison group, at select ages

Outcome	Group	Age 20	Age 25	Age 30
<i>A. Any Earnings (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	82.4 (0.4)	76.5 (0.6)	72.7 (0.8)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	84.4 (0.4)	80.2 (0.6)	76.0 (0.8)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	71.3 (1.2)	55.6 (1.7)	50.0 (2.6)
(4)	SSI Comparison	36.2 (0.2)	35.3 (0.3)	34.3 (0.5)
<i>B. Mean Earnings (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	6,684 (77)	12,540 (179)	15,188 (318)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	7,167 (86)	13,620 (198)	16,500 (348)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	4,096 (144)	6,297 (321)	6,335 (569)
(4)	SSI Comparison	1,594 (17)	3,187 (47)	4,291 (98)
<i>C. Earnings above annualized substantial gainful activity (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	26.0 (0.5)	45.8 (0.7)	47.5 (0.9)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	28.4 (0.5)	49.4 (0.7)	51.4 (1.0)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	13.0 (0.9)	24.5 (1.5)	21.4 (2.1)
(4)	SSI Comparison	4.4 (0.1)	10.9 (0.2)	14.1 (0.3)
<i>D. Earnings above annualized federal minimum wage (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	18.7 (0.4)	41.8 (0.7)	45.3 (0.9)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	20.5 (0.5)	45.3 (0.7)	49.0 (1.0)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	9.5 (0.8)	21.9 (1.4)	19.8 (2.1)
(4)	SSI Comparison	3.5 (0.1)	9.9 (0.2)	13.2 (0.3)
<i>N</i>				
	All Bridges participants	9,266	5,573	2,898
	Participants not on SSI at 17	7,809	4,751	2,524
	Participants on SSI at 17	1,457	822	374
	SSI Comparison	54,947	24,825	10,477

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Substantial gainful activity is the monthly level of work activity SSA uses to define an individual's ability to work for eligibility purposes for SSDI and SSI. The annualized amount is 12*SGA. The annual full-time federal minimum wage is defined as 40*50*minimum wage (i. e., 50 weeks of 40 hours of work). Individuals remain in the analysis through either their oldest age or the age when they are deceased. Earnings are adjusted to 2009 dollars using the CPI-U. The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

These earnings levels are not high, however. With the exception of the age-30 non-SSI group, at none of these four ages do more than half the members of any group earn more than the annualized level of SGA. At age 30, 51 percent of non-SSI receiving Bridges youths and 48 percent of all Bridges youths earned above the annualized SGA level (\$11,760 in 2009), but only 21 percent of Bridges youth who received SSI and 14 percent of the SSI comparison group did. Similar, but slightly lower percentages earned above the annualized federal minimum wage (\$14,500 in 2009).

Focusing on those with earnings (Table 3), we find that 68 percent of non-SSI receiving Bridges youths with earnings and 65 percent of all Bridges youth with earnings earn above the annualized SGA at age 30 and 65 and 62 percent, respectively, earn above the annualized federal minimum wage with average earnings of \$20,900. As suggested by the measures in Table 2, fewer

of those who received SSI at age 17 – in the Bridges or the comparison group – achieve these levels of earnings.

4.2. Do youth who participate in Bridges receive SSI or DI?

We now turn to the patterns of SSI and DI participation. Bridges services are intended to foster labor market success, which should in turn reduce disability receipt. While SSI receipt remains relatively stable at 17 percent through age 30, DI receipt grows from 3 percent at age 20 to 14 percent at age 30 (Table 4). For youths receiving SSI at age 17, SSI receipt declines over time: from 68 percent of Bridges SSI youths at 20 to 49 percent at age 30 and from 73 percent of the SSI comparison group at age 20 to 56 percent at age 30. The relatively stable percentage of all Bridges youth receiving SSI through age 30 is likely due to some youth who

Table 3
Earnings of all placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants receiving SSI at age 17, and SSI comparison group, at select ages, conditional on having earnings

Outcome	Group	Age 20	Age 25	Age 30
<i>A. Mean Earnings (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	8,115 (85)	16,382 (199)	20,900 (367)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	7,167 (86)	13,620 (198)	16,500 (348)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	5,743 (178)	11,327 (457)	12,669 (931)
(4)	SSI Comparison	4,400 (41)	9,035 (110)	12,511 (230)
<i>B. Earnings above annualized substantial gainful activity (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	31.5 (0.5)	59.8 (0.8)	65.4 (1.0)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	33.6 (0.6)	61.7 (0.8)	67.6 (1.1)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	18.3 (1.2)	44.0 (2.3)	42.8 (3.6)
(4)	SSI Comparison	12.2 (0.2)	30.8 (0.5)	41.1 (0.8)
<i>C. Earnings above annualized federal minimum wage (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	22.7 (0.5)	54.6 (0.8)	62.3 (1.1)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	24.2 (0.5)	56.4 (0.8)	64.5 (1.1)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	13.4 (1.1)	39.4 (2.3)	39.6 (3.6)
(4)	SSI Comparison	9.7 (0.2)	28.1 (0.5)	38.5 (0.8)
<i>N</i>				
	All Bridges participants	7,632	4,266	2,106
	Participants not on SSI at 17	6,593	3,809	1,919
	Participants on SSI at 17	1,039	457	187
	SSI Comparison	19,903	8,758	3,593

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Substantial gainful activity is the monthly level of work activity SSA uses to define an individual's ability to work for eligibility purposes for SSDI and SSI. The annualized amount is 12*SGA. The annual full-time federal minimum wage is defined as 40*50*minimum wage (i. e., 50 weeks of 40 hours of work). Individuals remain in the analysis through either their oldest age or the age when they are deceased. Earnings are adjusted to 2009 dollars using the CPI-U. The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

were not receiving SSI at age 17 receiving SSI at older ages.

Note that at age 18 there is a redetermination of SSI eligibility according to adult medical rules and so the initial decline in SSI participation from age 17 to age 20 is likely unrelated to work. However, the increase in DI receipt from less than 10 percent of these groups to 30 percent for the Bridges SSI youths and 20 percent of the SSI comparison group is directly related to increased work activity by the youth. Specifically, employment increases the quarters of coverage for the DI program earned by youths, and younger individuals require fewer quarters of coverage than older individuals to become eligible for DI (Burkhauser & Daly, 2010).

Overall, Bridges youths receive roughly \$16,000 in SSI payments between ages 18 and 30, on average (Table 5). Not surprisingly, this is \$45,000 to \$65,000 less than the two groups that were on SSI at age 17. Conversely, Bridges youths as a whole received twice the DI payments through age 30 than the SSI com-

parison group, but about \$3,000 less than the Bridges participants who received SSI at age 17.

Average income from earnings plus SSA disability payments (SSI plus DI) is similar to average earnings (Table 6). At age 30, about 29 percent of Bridges youths' income comes from SSA disability payments. This percentage is 67 percent and 73 percent for youths in the Bridges SSI and SSI comparison groups, respectively. While this percentage drops for the SSI comparison group (from 82 percent at age 20), it increases for the Bridges populations, reflecting the increase in DI participation by the latter groups. Between 12 and 15 percent of youths in the four groups have no income on the administrative records at age 30.

5. Discussion and implications

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities' *Bridges from School to Work* program provides a vocational service model designed to help equip youth

Table 4

SSA disability program receipt of all placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants receiving SSI at age 17, and SSI comparison group, at select ages

Outcome	Group	Age 20	Age 25	Age 30
<i>A. SSI Receipt (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	17.4 (0.4)	16.6 (0.5)	16.9 (0.6)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	7.8 (0.3)	10.0 (0.4)	11.7 (0.6)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	67.7 (1.2)	54.4 (1.6)	50.3 (2.3)
(4)	SSI Comparison	73.0 (0.2)	70.1 (0.3)	57.3 (0.5)
<i>B. DI Receipt (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	3.0 (0.2)	9.9 (0.4)	14.0 (0.6)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	2.0 (0.2)	7.3 (0.4)	11.6 (0.6)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	8.0 (0.7)	25.0 (1.4)	29.5 (2.1)
(4)	SSI Comparison	6.3 (0.1)	16.4 (0.2)	20.4 (0.4)
<i>N</i>				
	All Bridges participants	10,007	6,223	3,417
	Participants not on SSI at 17	8,407	5,302	2,960
	Participants on SSI at 17	1,600	921	457
	SSI Comparison	54,947	24,825	10,477

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Individuals remain in the analysis through either their oldest age or the age when they are deceased. The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

Table 5

Average cumulative SSI payments and DI benefits since age 18 of all placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants receiving SSI at age 17, and SSI comparison group, at select ages

Outcome	Group	Through Age 20	Through Age 25	Through Age 30
<i>A. Average cumulative SSI payments since age 18 (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	3,876 (80)	9,884 (251)	16,087 (527)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	1,061 (44)	4,396 (178)	9,026 (416)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	18,652 (192)	41,334 (760)	61,115 (1,757)
(4)	SSI Comparison	20,537 (36)	52,652 (146)	81,163 (360)
<i>B. Average cumulative DI benefits since age 18 (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	1,492 (52)	5,090 (182)	9,954 (405)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	1,620 (60)	4,944 (203)	9,440 (438)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	825 (76)	5,926 (381)	13,236 (1,066)
(4)	SSI Comparison	87 (3)	1,711 (39)	5,499 (148)
<i>C. Sum of cumulative SSI and DI benefits since age 18 (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	5,368	14,974	26,041
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	2,680	9,340	18,466
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	19,477	47,260	74,351
(4)	SSI Comparison	20,624	54,362	86,662

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Average cumulative SSI and DI payments include age 18 through ages 20, 25, and 35 (inclusive). Individuals are included in the analysis only if they attain age 20, 25, or 30, respectively. Benefits are adjusted to 2009 dollars using the CPI-U. The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

with job success skills and link them to meaningful employment, reducing their dependence on public programs. In this paper we have documented the evolution of earnings and SSI and DI participation rates over the life cycle of participants in the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities' *Bridges from School*

to Work program and compared that data with results for a comparison group that did not participate in Bridges.

The overall results relative to the cohort of Bridges participants who were and were not receiving SSI at age 17 are pretty straightforward and anticipated, given

Table 6
Income of all placed Bridges participants, placed Bridges participants receiving SSI at age 17, and SSI comparison group, at select ages

Outcome	Group	Age 20	Age 25	Age 30
<i>A. Income (Earnings plus SSI plus DI) (\$)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	8,363 (75)	13,942 (164)	16,410 (287)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	8,126 (86)	14,515 (187)	17,440 (322)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	9,556 (139)	10,833 (274)	10,348 (460)
(4)	SSI Comparison	7,916 (21)	9,202 (46)	9,486 (97)
<i>B. Percent of income from SSA (%)^a</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	22.4 (0.4)	24.1 (0.5)	28.6 (0.8)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	13.7 (0.4)	17.1 (0.5)	22.5 (0.8)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	65.3 (1.0)	62.6 (1.5)	67.3 (2.1)
(4)	SSI Comparison	82.0 (0.1)	77.0 (0.2)	72.6 (0.4)
<i>C. Percent with no income (%)</i>				
(1)	All Bridges participants	11.5 (0.3)	13.2 (0.4)	13.7 (0.6)
(2)	Participants not on SSI at 17	12.8 (0.4)	14.1 (0.5)	13.9 (0.7)
(3)	Participants on SSI at 17	4.9 (0.5)	8.1 (0.9)	12.5 (1.5)
(4)	SSI Comparison	8.6 (0.1)	9.5 (0.2)	14.5 (0.3)

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Individuals remain in the analysis through either their oldest age or the age when they are deceased. Earnings and benefits are adjusted to 2009 dollars using the CPI-U. The "All" group includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. "Not on SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that did not receive SSI at age 17. "On SSI at Age 17" is the subset of the "All" group that received SSI at age 17. The "SSI Comparison" group includes individuals who resided in the ZIP codes served by Bridges at age 17 and received SSI at age 17 during the study years.

^aIf income greater than or equal to zero.

that individuals with disabilities who are receiving SSI are likely to be harder to serve than those who are not. The full Bridges population and the non-SSI receiving Bridges participants were, at every stage, employed at a much higher rate, earned substantially more, and participated in SSI and/or DI much less than their peers (in and out of Bridges) who were on SSI at age 17. Put in a larger context, non-SSI Bridges participants with earnings at age 30 earned about the same as individuals with disabilities with earnings in the larger population.⁶ However, it's difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this given the large number of potentially causal routes for this finding and differences in population definitions.

Results for Bridges participants who were receiving SSI at age 17, and the non-Bridges, SSI-receiving comparison group are a good deal more intriguing. Davies, Rupp, and Wittenburg (2009) found that average earnings for SSI children at ages 29–33, conditional on earnings, are about \$12,000 (in 2007 dollars). This is just slightly below our estimate both for the SSI comparison group at age 30 (\$12,511 in 2009 dollars), and the SSI Bridges participant group, also at 30 (\$12,699

in 2009 dollars). At first glance it would appear that Bridges participation upon leaving high school makes little difference to an individual's earnings potential as an adult. However a key qualifier for this data, *conditional on earnings*, suggests otherwise. While the average earnings of the Bridges SSI group and the SSI comparison group are virtually the same, 50 percent of the Bridges group have earnings at age 30 while only 34 percent of the comparison group do. Accordingly, as reflected in Table 2, the mean earnings of each SSI Bridges participant is \$6,335 (not conditional on earnings), 48 percent higher than the mean earnings of the group of similarly-aged SSI recipients in their local areas who did not participate in Bridges (\$4,291, also not conditional on earnings). While both of these mean earnings figures suggest lots of room for improvement, they, along with the earnings figures relative to SGA and minimum wage, suggest that Bridges participation potentially helps create a higher earnings capacity for participants.

The fact that, at every age break, a lower percentage of Bridges SSI youth receive SSI benefits than their non-Bridges SSI counterparts is not surprising—one would expect that result given their *a priori* disadvantages. On the other hand, that the percentage of Bridges SSI youth receiving DI at age 30 is 54 percent higher than the percentage of non-Bridges SSI youth receiving those benefits is, on its face, surprising. As was explored earlier in this paper, this may be partially attributable to

⁶According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income of individuals with disabilities with earnings was \$18,865 in 2009. http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_09_1YR.B18140&prodType=table (last accessed 8/9/13). Median earnings for the non-SSI Bridges cohort at age 30 was \$17,915 (not reported).

the fact that DI is a benefit that is directly related to work – work experience gained through Bridges could make individuals eligible for DI. Since SSI and DI have a common definition of disability⁷, transitioning from SSI to DI is a matter of adequate work history. It is important to note that, notwithstanding the increased DI participation for Bridges SSI youth, the total (SSI and DI) benefits received by Bridges participants who were on SSI at age 17, cumulative from age 18 to age 30, were on average \$12,311 (17 percent) less than the comparison group of non-Bridges SSI recipients. Even if only a portion of this is directly attributable to Bridges, there is a potential for such a program to be cost-effective from an administrative standpoint.

5.1. Limitations and implications for future research

There are two primary limitations to the current study. First, there are likely motivational, behavioral, or other factors driving youth participation in Bridges (which relies on voluntary enrollment). Without some independent comparison group, the results cannot be interpreted as causal. That said, the results for Bridges participants are consistent with what one would expect from such a program – higher earnings than the general SSI population and lower SSI participation.

Second, participants likely receive services provided by other programs as well as from Bridges. Identifying who receives what services from whom is necessary to determine the extent to which Bridges is the cause of these outcomes. For example, Bridges is a subcontractor to some VR agencies, and many of the youths who participate in Bridges are involved with VR. Future research could match the data set used for this analysis with VR data to determine if the programs are complements or substitutes.

It is noteworthy that in almost all measures, results for Bridges participants seem to plateau or even drop off a bit as the individual ages. Results are still positive relative to the comparison group at age 30, but the differences are, generally, not as striking as they are at age 20. Substantial changes in the Bridges model over the past 15 years (e.g., length of interface and career/retention focus) could be responsible for this

plateauing – perhaps the program that younger participants are experiencing is simply stronger than the program that participants experienced 10 to 15 years ago. But this could also indicate the need to continue to tweak the program to improve the longevity of its effect. In future studies it will be interesting to track long-term outcomes of participants over the various iterations of the Bridges model. Relatedly, Bridges is actively testing the efficacy of the SSA' Ticket to Work program as an Employment Networks in several sites. Future study could explore what aspects of that program work for youth with disabilities and employment-driven transition programs. Additionally, methods such as those used by Doren, Gau, and Lindstrom (2011) may enable future research to identify what best works for whom.

5.2. Implications for practice

The results presented in this paper are consistent with other studies that formal services of the sort that Bridges provides can improve the employment prospects of young people with disabilities (e.g., Test et al., 2009). Particular Bridges features include: a strong employer focus in the delivery of services; a focus on the skills and interests of the youth being served, rather than on their disability; matching the talents of the youth and the needs of the employer; and provision of support services to the youth and the employer both pre- and post-placement.

The success of all of these features is dependent upon the development of a skilled and motivated staff to deliver the services. High-performing Bridges staff have been identified to have: principled optimism; cultural competence; business-oriented professionalism; and networking savvy (Tilson & Simonsen, 2013). Attention to these competencies in the hiring and training of staff may, ultimately, be as important to success as the specific features of the model used.

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⁷The definition of disability for adults (ages 18 and older) for SSI and DI are identical. There are some differences between the definition of disability for children (younger than age 18) and adults; however, two thirds of child SSI recipients continue into the adult program (Hemmeter & Gilby, 2009) and the majority retain their diagnostic grouping (Hemmeter, 2012).

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Appendix A

Demographic characteristics of non-placed Bridges participants

	Non-Placed Bridges Participants
Location	
Atlanta	13.9 (0.6)
Chicago	18.4 (0.7)
Dallas	1.6 (0.2)
Fairfax County (VA)	1.4 (0.2)
Los Angeles	23.7 (0.7)
New Orleans	0.4 (0.1)
Oakland	1.1 (0.2)
Philadelphia	6.7 (0.4)
San Francisco	15.2 (0.6)
Washington Metro	17.5 (0.7)
Disability	
Physical Disabilities	13.8 (0.6)
Intellectual, Developmental, and Mental Disabilities	86.2 (0.6)
Age at Bridges Enrollment	
16	2.7 (0.3)
17	18.6 (0.7)
18	37.2 (0.8)
19	24.7 (0.7)
20	10.4 (0.5)
21	4.2 (0.3)
22	1.8 (0.2)
23	0.4 (0.1)
Program	
Bridges	52.7 (0.9)
Bridges Plus	47.3 (0.9)
Sex	
Male	54.2 (0.9)
Female	45.8 (0.9)
Year of Bridges Enrollment	
1991–1995	9.9 (0.5)
1996–2000	21.6 (0.7)
2001–2005	34.9 (0.8)
2006–2010	33.6 (0.8)
Received SSI at Age 17	
Not on SSI at Age 17	78.6 (0.7)
On SSI at Age 17	21.4 (0.7)

Source: Authors' calculations using Bridges and Social Security Administration data. Note: Includes Bridges participants refers to all youths ages 16–23 not placed by Bridges into a job who entered the program between 1991 and 2010. N = 3,338. Standard errors in parentheses.