

Life Coaching and Disconnected Youth

A Unique Programmatic Element of the Linking Innovation Knowledge Employment (@LIKE) Program

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This is the final installment of three issue briefs on innovative aspects of the @LIKE program that can help to inform WIOA youth requirements. The [first brief](#) discussed effective recruitment, outreach, and engagement strategies. The [second brief](#) focused on participant assessments aimed at understanding individuals' cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

IMPAQ International evaluates and enhances public programs and policies. Strumpf Associates is a small cadre of training and consulting experts, headquartered in Washington, DC.

OVERVIEW

This is the third in a series of policy briefs focused on the programmatic elements of the Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment (@LIKE) program. The Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) is implementing this U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-funded program in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties. The main objective of the program is to serve disconnected young adults aged 18–24, not enrolled in school, working, or serving in the armed forces. This issue brief focuses on the role of the Life Coach in helping @LIKE participants achieve their educational and employment goals. Our analyses of participants' outcomes show that participation and intensity of life coaching bears a positive relationship to key educational and employment outcomes.

A key youth program element in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and one that continues to be maintained in the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines is the provision of adult mentoringⁱ and guidance and counseling services to eligible youth.ⁱⁱ Under WIA and now WIOA, individuals are eligible to receive adult mentoring services for at least 12 months that may occur during and after program participation.

The services provided by @LIKE Life Coaches described in the next section most closely align with the adult mentoring and guidance-counseling services provided under WIA and WIOA. However, there are several significant differences between @LIKE Life Coach and WIOA mentor in terms of role, responsibilities, and training. Of these, the most prominent difference is that a Life Coach is a **trained, certified professional** whose key professional responsibility is to assist with socio-emotional development.

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The first key difference between Mentors and Life Coaches is that the latter receive mandatory formal training that results in a certificate to equip them to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. Whereas, individuals providing adult mentoring services under WIOA typically do so on a volunteer basis and may lack formal training. Secondly, @LIKE Life Coaches provide services to participants for however long an individual is in the program. This is in contrast to WIOA, which limits the amount of time an individual can receive adult mentoring services to a total of 12 months. Finally, @LIKE Life Coaches are integral to the program approach, designed to increase the intensity of the services provided. They are in constant and regular communication with @LIKE participants and their case managers. Adult mentoring and guidance counseling services are often secondary support for WIOA Youth programs. These youth programs often primarily focus on secondary school completion, paid or unpaid work experiences for in-demand occupations, external barrier removal such as housing and transportation, and occupational skills training. @LIKE includes all these elements and in addition, Life Coaches help young adults develop their internal capabilities in a very formal manner so that they become more resilient and confident, developing a belief in their own abilities to accomplish their goals.

WHO IS A LIFE COACH?

Life Coaches, trained and certified in life coaching skills (see endnote iii and iv), are individuals who serve as personal coaches to identify existing internal and external assets, strengths, and resources of each participant. Through the coaching process, Life Coaches guide participants to a deeper understanding of themselves and gave participants power and a sense of self-efficacy—an “I can do this” and resiliency – “I can continue on no matter what” attitude that

enabled participants to successfully move through the program and achieve their personal goals. Each of the nine delivery sites included the position of a Life Coach. In all instances but one, the Life Coach was a different position from that of a Case Manager. This distinction between the Case Manager and Life Coach role is key

It is not just what my Life Coach connected me to. It was having someone believe in me. It was the whole package. The people, the experience. They learn your name. Ask you about your day. They genuinely mean it.”

–@LIKE Participant

(described below). Under WIOA, individuals are generally only assigned a Case Manager, who ensures individuals are complying with program requirements and milestones. While Life Coaches help support these activities, they focus more on building individual self-efficacy and resiliency to achieve goals and meet requirements that will lead to successful outcomes. The dual-pronged approach, focusing on external skill building and accomplishments while also building a young adult’s internal capacity to feel confident and to bounce back when things go wrong, was a key differentiator to the success of @LIKE. This design to supporting participants under @LIKE was an attempt to fill the perceived gap under WIA in serving disconnected young adults who have little to no support systems.

Life Coaches usually met with each participant soon after enrollment to develop an Individual Service Strategy (ISS). Since the relationship between the Life Coach and the participant was expected to be one in which the participant feels comfortable sharing personal challenges, @LIKE program staff made every

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effort to place participants with particular Life Coaches with whom they “click.” Overall, Life Coaches utilized youth development principles and practices to support soft skills training, guide educational development, arrange support services, and help participants explore careers and interests.

Life Coaches used a variety of techniques to engage young participants—mail, email, phone calls, text messaging, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Kik, house calls, fundraisers, and field trips. The method of engagement was adapted to meet the needs of the participant.

LIFE COACH TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

The program required all Life Coaches to be trained and certified through the Coach U's Core Essentials Program within 6 months of hire.ⁱⁱⁱ The @LIKE program used social/psychological assessment tools to gauge the needs of program participants, track participant progress, and identify effective wraparound services (see the Issue Brief: [Using Assessments to Serve Disconnected Young Adults under WIOA](#)). Life Coaches also received training on how to interpret these assessment results, which help them to understand participants' needs, personality, and assets, to guide their interactions with participants, track progress over time and adjust participants' personal, educational, and employment goals accordingly.

LIFE COACHES AND CASE MANAGERS

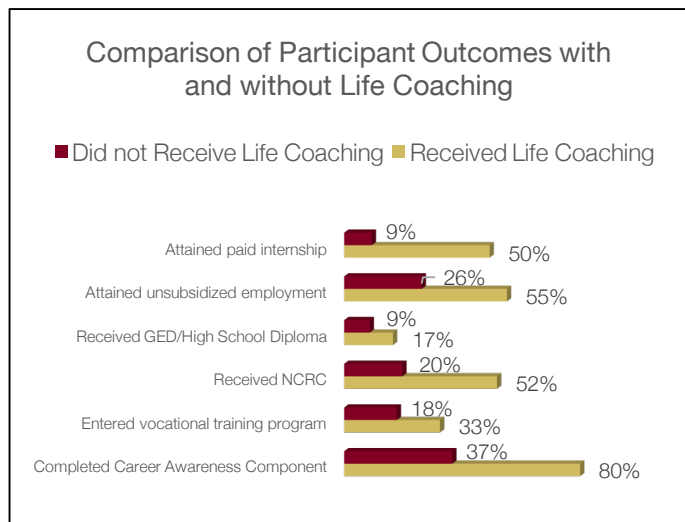
Similar to other workforce development programs, the @LIKE program assigns each participant to a Case Manager. However, a unique and core component of the program is the *additional availability* of a certified Life Coach.

Overall, Case Manager and Life Coach roles are complementary in the @LIKE program. They both assist participants to reach their personal goals. However, the crucial distinction between the roles is that Case Managers are responsible for much of the program's administrative duties (e.g., program enrollment and eligibility determination) and focus on the coordination of service needs, whereas the Life Coach establishes a personal relationship with participants designed to help them build internal capacity to overcome obstacles.

Case management does not solely revolve around the participant whereas life coaching does. For instance, in life coaching, a participant's goal may be to become a better problem solver or to manage conflict differently. However, if he/she chooses not to work on exercises provided to them to learn different skills, it does not have an effect on their program status but affects his/her own personal goals. However, when individuals are in 'case management' and do not meet the obligations there may be programmatic consequences where the lack of expected results may negatively affect the client.^v

While the program design proposed that two different individuals should perform the duties of Life Coach and Case Manager, due to funding constraints at some sites, the organizational structure of the nine sites varied in how the roles of Life Coaches and Case Managers were actualized. Some sites maintained separation between the two roles, while others combined them into a dual role. @LIKE participants indicated their preference for having separate individuals perform the Life Coach and Case Manager roles.

DOES LIFE COACHING MATTER FOR PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES?



When speaking of their successes in the program, participants readily pointed to the role their Life Coaches played. Successful coaches were described as being non-judgmental and supportive. For example, one participant during an on-site visit explained how easy it was to reach out to the Life Coach for guidance and support: “With my Life Coach I can walk [in] the door. We have the trust, the confidence. I chat with my Life Coach every day. We sit down once a week.”

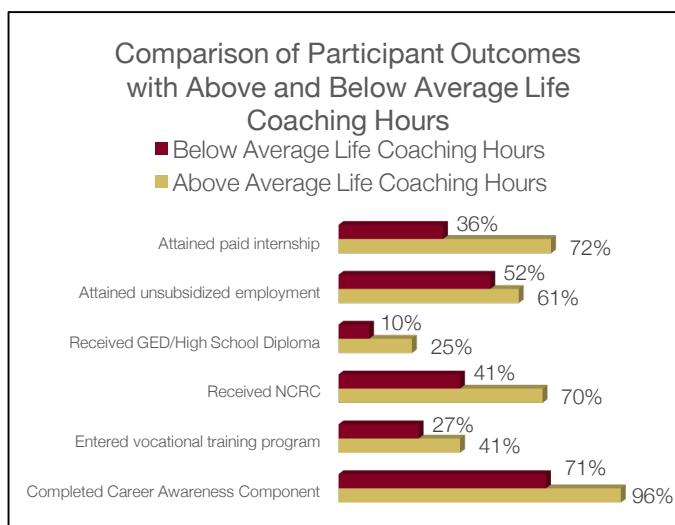
The vast majority of @LIKE program participants received life coaching services. Of the participants who received these services, the average participant received 23 hours of life coaching, administered over a 15-month period. Across all participants who received life coaching services, intensity ranged from half an hour to 196 hours. Empirical analyses of participants’ outcomes reveal that life coaching bears a positive relationship to key educational and employment outcomes. As shown in the first graph, attainment of all program outcomes was substantially higher for @LIKE participants who received life coaching as compared to their @LIKE counterparts who did not. For example, the rate of receipt of a National Career

Readiness Certificate (NCRC) for participants with life coaching was more than twice that of their counterparts who did not take part in life coaching services. Similarly, the rate of placement in unsubsidized employment for those with and without life coaching was 55 versus 26 percent.

Not just does mere participation in life coaching matter, but so does the *intensity* of life coaching. In other words, participants who are more heavily engaged in life coaching (or those with above average hours of life coaching services) do better by a large margin on all outcomes, as seen in the second graph.

CONCLUSION

Life Coaches are a unique and innovative feature of the @LIKE program and have been essential to its success in serving disconnected young adult participants. The experiences of the @LIKE program highlight the need for a dedicated individual to provide life coaching services that allow a disconnected participant to reconnect by building a belief in their own abilities and become self-sufficient. This is of particular importance going forward under WIOA, given the focus on out-of-school, disconnected youth, who often require more intensive services beyond skill development in order to achieve employment and educational outcomes.



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By taking these lessons learned from the @LIKE program, WIOA youth service providers can provide their out-of-school youth participants with Life Coaches in order to improve employment and educational outcomes. While the statutory authority for adult mentoring and guidance counseling services under WIOA allows youth service providers to deliver similar services to that of Life Coaches, a true commitment must be made by the local area to training and certifying Life Coaches to provide the supports many out-of-school youths simply do not have.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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OUR EXPERTS



Dr. Sonam Gupta (Ph.D., Economics, University of Arizona) is an applied economist with expertise in evaluation of workforce development, child health, child labor and nutrition related programs. She has several years of experience in

research and all aspects of project management including design, implementation, and evaluation. Dr. Gupta has published in top peer-reviewed journals and is adept at presenting her research to diverse technical and non-technical audiences. She serves as the Project Manager for evaluation of the @LIKE program.



Zachary Miller (MPA, Nonprofit Management, George Washington University; CLSSGB) has over twelve years of programmatic experience throughout the public, private,

and nonprofit sectors and over five years of research and evaluation experience. He has expertise with workforce and community development, process assessment and improvement initiatives, program implementation and evaluation, youth development, and building organizational capacities.



Luke Patterson (B.A., Economics, Cornell University) has extensive experience with analyzing data and conducting impact studies on workforce and training programs.

Proficient with many different kinds of data analyses, Mr. Patterson has handled the data management for @LIKE and many other projects. Mr. Patterson has also been responsible for the creation of several interactive tools to help clients and other audiences better understand evaluation results.



Dr. Mithuna Srinivasan (Ph.D., Economics, The Ohio State University) is an applied economist with expertise in Labor Economics, Applied Econometrics, and Household Behavior and Family Economics.

Dr. Srinivasan has significant experience in the application of advanced statistical and econometric techniques for data analysis, and in managing different types of databases. Dr. Srinivasan has been involved in projects related to food and nutrition, and in impact evaluations of workforce development programs.



Lori Strumpf (BA in Psychology and Criminal Justice; MA in Counseling Education; Specialist Degree (EDS) in Counseling

Education) has over thirty years in the field of organizational development and change management in human services and workforce development organizations. She is a nationally known expert in organizational management, training and design for education, training, and human resource development systems. Prior to moving to Washington, D.C. to work on the Vice President's Task Force for Youth Employment, Lori was the Assistant Director to a project for court diverted delinquent youth. She also worked at Florida State Prison, counseling prisoners. As a consultant to Riverside County's Workforce Development Board, she has served as the Project Director to @LIKE since its inception.

ⁱ WIOA Sec. 129(c)(2)(H)

ⁱⁱ WIOA Sec. 129(c)(2)(J)

ⁱⁱⁱ See <http://www.coachinc.com/CoachU/default.asp?s=1>.

^{iv} The Core Essentials Program provides a home-based program delivery option via facilitated TeleClasses. This delivery method allows Life Coaches to set their own pace to complete the 77-hour

course within @LIKE's established timeline. Coaches enrolled in the program receive a course textbook and a set of resource materials and reference books.

^v @LIKE Program Guidance: Difference between a Life Coach and a Case Manager