

What is the community challenge?

Children residing in neighborhoods with significant challenges such as poverty, limited English proficiency, few early childhood education resources, and low expectations concerning academic achievement are at a higher risk for shortfall in school achievement. The Denver Housing Authority (DHA) estimates school drop-out rates in Denver housing neighborhoods to be upwards of 80%.

What is the promising solution?

The Bridge Project seeks to provide a comprehensive early literacy intervention targeting children K-3rd grade, with the goal of achieving reading at grade level by the end of third grade, and promoting subsequent academic achievement.

The intervention includes three program components: 1) ReadWell, which features mastery-based and research-validated instructional strategies delivered by trained educators. These strategies include multiple entry points for placement into appropriate small groups, a unique sound sequence, differentiated instruction with flexible pacing, and ongoing assessment/progress monitoring; 2) GR8 (Great) Readers, which provides kindergarten through third graders with eight books over the course of the school year and another eight books over the summer in the hopes of building their love of reading, their home libraries, and their access to age and content appropriate books; and 3) One-on-one tutoring for a minimum of 45 minutes per week where participants are matched with a trained adult tutor for the academic year and meet with the same tutor at least once a week throughout the school year. Through a combination of these three direct literacy programs, the Bridge Project offers participants the opportunity to experience many facets of literacy and allows them to take an active role in their learning.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

To determine the effectiveness of this intervention, OMNI Institute (OMNI) developed a mixed-methods evaluation. Focused on program dosage, student characteristics, programming period (school year or summer), and implementation fidelity, the implementation evaluation consists of three research questions:

1. What level of program intervention was provided?
2. To what extent did volunteer tutors and education specialists deliver the program with fidelity? Was this consistent across Bridge sites?
3. What are implementation challenges associated with each type of intervention, and do these differ as a function of child characteristics, site characteristics, or timing of the intervention? What are acceptable solutions to these challenges?

The impact evaluation, consisting of a quasi-experimental, between-group design for a full sample and a propensity score matched group design sample. These analyses assessed whether students who receive Bridge Project services show greater gains in literacy skills than similar students who do not receive Bridge services. Students in K-3rd grades entering the Bridge Project in four public housing neighborhoods served as the

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: ReadWell, GR8 Readers, one-on-one tutoring

Subgrantee: The Bridge Project

Intermediary: Mile High United Way

Focus Area(s): Youth Development/Education

Focus Population(s): Elementary school students with low level of reading skills

Community(ies) Served: Denver, Colorado

treatment group. Comparison students were recruited from two similar public housing communities in which Bridge Project services are not currently available. Reading and services data were collected and analyzed to make comparisons between the two groups.

The impact analysis includes data from the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 school years and includes a total of 263 Bridge Project students and 108 similar comparison students, for a total sample size of 371. The impact evaluation sought to answer three research questions:

1. Do more Bridge children show improvements in reading at or above grade level than comparison children?
2. Does the amount or type of programming predict reading gains?
3. Which program activities are most closely associated with reading gains? What are the critical program elements for success? Do those children who receive all three intervention components improve to a greater degree than children who receive only one or two components?

What did the evaluation find?

The final summative evaluation report incorporates data from all five years of the project and has the following major findings:

- The Bridge program appears to significantly benefit students' reading proficiency, particularly after the first year of programming. By their second and third years in the program, Bridge students were outperforming their peers.
- The number of programming elements received and the amount of programming received in each element was positively related to reading proficiency.
- Overall, it does not appear that the Bridge program is related to school attendance.
- Read Well and tutoring sessions were largely on-task and provided high-quality instruction to Bridge students. High quality indicators included educator competencies and demonstrated student learning in the five fundamental literacy skill areas.

Notes on the evaluation

The evaluation encountered difficulties recruiting comparison group participants and faced challenges resulting from missing literacy outcome data. The research team in collaboration with Bridge staff improved their data collection and management processes.

How is the Bridge Project using the evaluation findings to improve?

The current study identified opportunities to enhance program infrastructure and implementation, including adding and refining staff roles, strengthening its volunteer training program, and implementing standardized continuous quality improvement efforts.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit nationalservice.gov/research.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Impact evaluation (quasi-experimental design with propensity score matching) and implementation evaluation

Study Population: Kindergarten through 3rd grade

(Independent) Evaluator(s): OMNI Institute

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.