

Wraparound Services Are Key to Helping Justice-Involved Los Angelenos Get and Keep Jobs



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In 2018, the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Reentry (referred to as “the Mayor’s Office” hereafter) launched Project imPACT, a wraparound reentry program for *justice-involved individuals* (i.e., individuals who have been involved in the criminal legal system) who have behavioral health concerns. The program aims to help participants, known as Fellows, obtain and retain jobs, with the ultimate goal of preventing future justice system contact.

Background

In its first three years, Project imPACT’s community-based partners operated out of four high-need areas of Los Angeles (LA)—South LA, Downtown LA, Watts, and the San Fernando Valley—providing employment, behavioral health, and legal services (see Figure 1). An evaluation of that group (Cohort 1) found that the model held promise: Providers addressed a variety of barriers to employment, and 44 percent of Fellows

obtained employment during the program, mostly in full-time positions.¹

In 2020, the Mayor’s Office received additional funding to continue the program (Cohort 2). Those funds allowed Project imPACT to expand in three key ways: (1) serving a larger number of Fellows in the existing four regions; (2) developing a pilot program to serve transition-aged youth reentering the community from youth correctional facilities; and (3) adding housing services for employed Fellows, including *housing navigation* (i.e., assistance finding housing or addressing housing-related issues, such as concerns with landlords) and the opportunity to live in a subsidized, shared transitional living setting operated by Project imPACT.

A team of researchers from the RAND Corporation and Harder+Company Community Research partnered with the Mayor’s Office to evaluate Cohort 2 of Project imPACT. This brief presents highlights from that evaluation report, including findings on program implementation and outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Interview preparedness and lack of a resume; managing stress and trauma; and correcting, removing, sealing, or expunging criminal records were among the most common barriers to employment that program service providers helped Fellows address.
- Both staff members and Fellows reported that having staff members with lived experience with the criminal justice system was a key asset of the program.
- Fellows who obtained jobs had been enrolled in the program longer and were more likely to have successfully completed the program than Fellows who were unemployed.
- Job retention rates for Fellows were strong. Among Fellows who obtained employment, 69 percent were employed six months after their initial employment, and 53 percent were still employed at the 12-month milestone.
- Among Fellows who had been enrolled in the program at least one year, the rate of reconviction was low (10 percent of the 186 Fellows with available records).

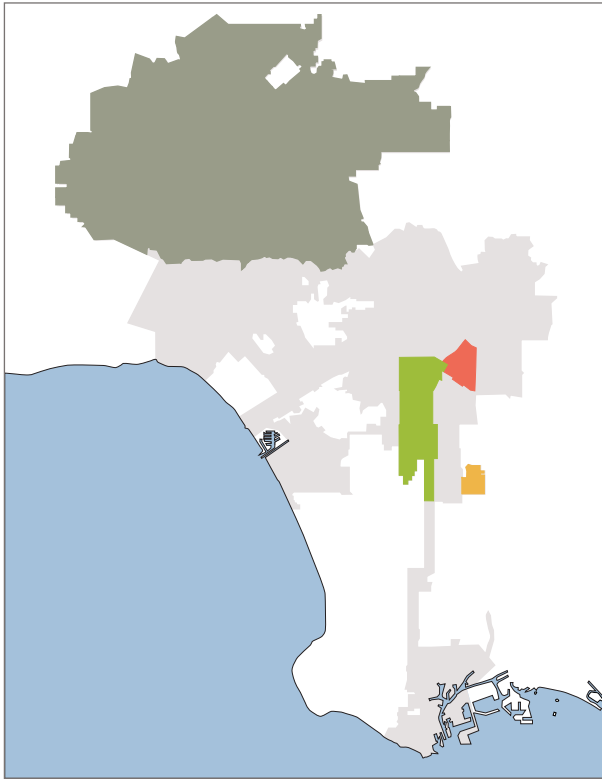
Program Implementation Findings

Between June 2020 and September 2022, 384 individuals enrolled in Project imPACT, exceeding the original Cohort 2 enrollment target of at least 200 Fellows (see Table 1 for details on Fellows’ demographic characteristics). Despite concerns that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic would affect recruitment, demand was similar to that observed for Cohort 1. Cohort 2 Fellows were determined to be medium or high risk of recidivism based on a structured risk-needs assessment. Most Fellows were unemployed on entering the program, and nearly one-half of Fellows were living with family or friends.

Within Cohort 2, about 86 percent of Fellows received employment services: Career readiness assessments and job coaching were the most common services. About three-quarters of Fellows participated in behavioral health services, especially individual

¹ For Cohort 1 results, see Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Alfonso Martin, Katya Migacheva, Amy Goldman, Nicole Bracy, Veronica Awan, and Sarah B. Hunter, *Evaluating the Implementation and Outcomes of Project imPACT Cohort 1 Final Local Evaluation Report*, RAND Corporation, RR-A1382-1, 2021.

FIGURE 1
Project imPACT Regions in Los Angeles



counseling sessions, and legal services, especially counsel and advice. Housing services were provided to about 15 percent of Fellows, and 13 individuals were housed in the Project imPACT shared housing at some point during this period.

Cohort 2 officially ended on February 15, 2023, several months after the publication of the RAND report, which presents data collected through September 2022. At the time of publication, 41 percent of Fellows were still receiving services, while 40 percent of Fellows had successfully completed the program and 19 percent of Fellows had exited the program without fulfilling all program requirements. There was no significant difference with respect to age, race/ethnicity, or recidivism risk level between individuals who completed the program and those who exited without completing the program.

Program Implementation Facilitators and Barriers

Providers described several implementation facilitators, including the teamwork, commitment, and

professionalism of providers; the ability to leverage existing relationships that providers had with other community-based organizations and employers; and the wraparound nature of the services, which ensured that Fellows were supported in multiple areas of their lives. One important aspect of Project imPACT is that each region has a peer navigator, who is a person with lived experience with the criminal justice system who helps Fellows through both the program and the reentry process. Both providers and Fellows said that having staff members with lived experience was a key asset of the program.

There were also barriers to implementation. For example, providers and Fellows called for housing options in more LA neighborhoods and fewer restrictions (e.g., so that parents could have their young children live with them). In addition, staff turnover among providers was a significant challenge, especially because months could go by before identifying a replacement provider. This interruption led to some decrease in the number of Fellows receiving services. Thus, a key recommendation to the program is to address staff turnover—for example, by providing more support for staff members and considering whether salaries are sufficient. In addition, because some degree of turnover is inevitable, the program could also find ways to mitigate the impact of turnover, perhaps by developing an implementation guide to maintain institutional knowledge when staff members leave.

“If you really understand someone’s experience, they don’t always have to explain it. It is the feeling of being seen without having to explain it.”

—Project imPACT provider

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Cohort 2 Fellows

Fellow Characteristic	Total Percentage of Fellows
Age (median in years)	37.9
Gender	
Male	80.7
Female	19.3
Race/ethnicity	
Black or African American	50.8
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	35.2
White	7.0
Another racial or ethnic group ^a	4.4
Multi-racial or -ethnic origin	1.8
Declined to state	0.8
Level of education	
Less than high school	24.0
High school diploma or GED	61.7
Some college or higher	13.5
Other	0.8
Employment status	
Employed full time	7.0
Employed part time	6.5
Unemployed	85.7
Other	0.8
Housing status	
Independent living	6.5
Transitional housing setting	30.7
Sober living home	6.3
Family or friend's house	44.8
Homeless–sheltered	6.5
Homeless–unsheltered	1.8
Other	3.4

^a Includes Native Hawaiian, Asian, and American Indian or Alaska Native.

Examples of Barriers Addressed by Project imPACT Services

- **Employment:** Lack of child care, appropriate clothing (for interviews and work), driver’s license, housing, interview preparedness, current resume, computer skills, motivation, and work tools; credential and certificate attainment; medical concerns; scheduling conflicts; transportation; workplace behavior; and visible tattoos.
- **Behavioral health:** Anger management, emotion regulation, mental health, trauma, substance use, stress management, time management, stigma, motivation, family relations, self-esteem, interpersonal relations, communication skills, difficulty with transition and adjustment to life in the community, and safety or risky behavior concerns.
- **Legal:** Correcting, removing, sealing, or expunging criminal records; Proposition 47 reclassification; occupational licenses; family reunification; eviction prevention; fines and fees; DMV license reinstatement; Ban the Box violations or hiring-related legal issues; public assistance; and other reclassifications.

COVID-19 had a big impact on how services were provided earlier in the program; providers had to shift to a remote model. There were some initial challenges, such as Fellows with limited access to technology and providers who were not familiar with remote-work technologies. However, even after in-person services were available again, many providers continued to deliver virtual services to maximize flexibility. This

option proved to be helpful for Fellows attending school or working, because they did not have to commute to the program office to receive services.

Program Outcomes

Employment

Among the most common barriers to employment that program service providers helped Fellows address were interview preparedness and lack of a resume; managing stress and trauma; and correcting, removing, sealing, or expunging criminal records. At the time of the report’s publication, 198 Fellows had obtained jobs (52 percent of enrolled fellows), most of whom held full-time jobs (74 percent of employed fellows). Fellows who obtained employment had been enrolled in the program longer (an average of 9.43 months for employed Fellows versus 8.22 months for unemployed Fellows) and were more likely to have successfully completed the program (64 percent of employed Fellows versus 36 percent of unemployed Fellows). However, the average time it took Fellows to obtain a job was only 1.63 months, suggesting that many Fellows got a job early in their Project imPACT experience. It is possible that staying enrolled in the program provided Fellows with the supports they needed to stay employed, although the study did not explicitly look at this relationship. As noted above, a subset of Fellows was still active in the program and receiving services through February 2023 after data collection. Therefore, rates of employment may be even higher than those presented in the final report.

Within the analyzed data, job retention rates were strong for the first six months after Fellows’ initial

“It was easy to interact and be opened up and trustworthy with all these individuals . . . because they came from the same struggles. They were able to help me build that trust with them and believe that they were really there to help out.”

—Project imPACT Fellow

employment: At three months, 74 percent of Fellows were still employed, and at six months, 69 percent of Fellows were still employed. The percentages started to decrease at nine and 12 months (63 percent and 53 percent, respectively), which is consistent with studies of other employment-focused reentry programs.

Housing

Fellows' housing stability appeared to improve during Project imPACT. Among Fellows who exited the program by September 2022, 87 Fellows had been in unstable housing settings when they entered the program (i.e., transitional housing, sober living, sheltered and unsheltered homelessness), but by the time they exited the program, 34 percent of these Fellows had transitioned to independent living settings, and 30 percent of these Fellows had moved in with family members or friends.

Recidivism

The study examined recidivism data for Fellows who had been in the program for at least one year. Of the 251 individuals who had been enrolled in Project imPACT for at least one year, the evaluation team was able to locate records from the LA County Superior Court for 186 individuals and looked for any convictions for a new arrest occurring after enrollment in Project imPACT.² Only 19 Fellows had been reconvicted (10 percent), a recidivism rate that appears to be somewhat lower than that of comparable populations.

² Some consider new convictions to be a fairly conservative measure of recidivism. However, this is California's definition of recidivism, and other indicators (e.g., arrest) were not used because they might be subject to more bias.

Program Satisfaction

Overall, Fellows were largely satisfied with the program, as the three following examples show:

Having this [criminal] history, it comes with a little bit of shame. Being with somebody that you can talk to about very, very personal things and they don't add to that, and they actually make you feel like you have worth, it's encouraging.

[Funding for vocational training] has been monumental because I didn't have the funds to get the license . . . I would have to work and save, man, forever to get here because it cost almost \$5,000.

[The behavioral health provider] was very instrumental in helping me with my attitude, adjusting and staying focused, and really just being the best employer or employee that I can be.

Conclusion

The findings of this report underscore the promise of Project imPACT as a model for serving individuals with behavioral health concerns who have been recently involved in the justice system. During their time in the program, Fellows were able to address key barriers to employment, obtain and retain employment, move into more-stable housing settings, and avoid reconviction. Project imPACT has already planned some key improvements for its third cohort, including increasing connections to external services for Fellows (e.g., a new substance use-referral pipeline) and alternative housing options. As it prepares to implement Cohort 3, the program will be able to build on the solid foundation laid by Cohorts 1 and 2.

This brief describes work done in RAND Social and Economic Well-Being and documented in *Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of Project imPACT—A Proposition 47-Funded Program in Los Angeles: Cohort 2 Final Evaluation Report*, by Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Katya Migacheva, Amy Goldman, Veronica Awan, Nicole Bracy, Sarah B. Hunter, RR-A1382-2, 2023 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR-A1382-2). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RBA1382-2. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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