

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From July 1995 through September 2001, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the Ford Foundation operated a demonstration of the Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP). QOP is an intensive case management and mentoring program for high school-aged youth that emphasizes after-school supplemental education, developmental activities, and community service activities. The primary goals of the program were to increase the likelihood that enrollees would complete high school and enter a postsecondary education and training program. The program was also intended to improve the youth's grades and achievement test scores and to reduce risky behaviors such as substance abuse, crime, and teenage childbearing.

The evaluation was designed to estimate the impacts of QOP on its enrollees and to yield information for program designers and managers on the challenges for program design, implementation, and operation. This report documents how QOP was implemented at each of the seven sites participating in the demonstration.

The method used for this report was to compare the implementation of the program at each demonstration site to the program model. The implementation at each site was observed during a visit lasting several days at each site in each year of the demonstration. Information was also gathered at annual staff conferences and periodic conference calls with site staff. During those visits, we met with each member of the QOP staff; officers of the community-based organization operating the site; officers of the local grantee organization; teachers; counselors; administrators of the QOP schools; and participating youth.

The key implementation findings follow:

- **QOP can be implemented through local community-based organizations, although the complete QOP model is difficult to replicate.** While none of the seven sites failed to implement the QOP demonstration, two sites implemented a version of QOP that deviated substantially from the program model, and the other five sites implemented programs that deviated moderately from the model. Deviations from the program model might have been reduced by using contracts or cooperative agreements rather than grants; by providing more time for the sites to plan and set up their operation; and by providing additional documentation, training, and technical assistance early in the sites' involvement in the program.
- **QOP enrolled a representative sample of the target group of disadvantaged youths.** In particular, QOP avoided the tendency of many youth programs to enroll the most motivated and able youth. Youth enrolled in QOP generally faced many barriers to educational success and needed many of the services offered by QOP. Given that many of these barriers were in place when the QOP enrollees joined the program in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, future funders may consider a QOP model for middle-school-age youth.

- **Fidelity to the program model varied widely, from a replication of most of QOP's components to a mere re-labeling of another youth program as QOP.** Fidelity of implementation appeared to be associated with whether the community-based organization (CBO) operating QOP at the site had a pre-existing program broadly similar to QOP in philosophy and structure.
- **Apart from the number of hours of participation, the prescribed intensity for QOP was implemented at most sites.** All sites implemented the prescribed ratio of roughly 15 to 25 enrollees per case manager. Most case managers stayed with the program for several years, and many stayed for the entire five-year duration of the demonstration. All of the sites, however, discovered that the intensity of QOP services had practical limits. QOP's policy of providing enrollees a great deal of access to case managers, some of whom were on-call seven days per week and 24 hours per day, and providing access to services regardless of the enrollee's behaviors (i.e., becoming incarcerated, moving to another community, dropping out of high school) was generally well implemented. The demonstration showed that such policies are limited by the case managers' personal lives and families, the physical difficulties of providing services to enrollees who moved to other states or metropolitan areas, and the legal limits on case manager overtime in the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- **All sites successfully implemented case management and mentoring.** Mentoring and case management formed the core of the QOP demonstration and were more intensive than in virtually any other youth program. Case managers reported forming relationships with about half of their caseloads, and those relationships resembled that of a caring aunt or uncle.
- **No site implemented all aspects of QOP's education component.** In particular, few sites regularly assessed academic performance using tests, no site developed individual education plans based on assessment results, no site implemented a sustained program of course-based tutoring, and only three sites effectively implemented computer-assisted instruction.
- **All sites successfully implemented developmental activities.** While developmental activities were intended to focus on life skills that would enable the youth to avoid risky behaviors, they included many recreational activities at most sites. Enrollees found recreational activities to be fun, and case managers found them useful for fostering active program participation.
- **Few sites implemented the community service component as intensively as prescribed in the program model, especially in the latter half of the demonstration.** Most sites decided to reallocate their resources away from community service to mentoring, case management, and educational activities. These decisions were based on case managers' assessment of enrollee needs.
- **Only two sites offered the prescribed number of hours of education, developmental, and community service activities.** Other sites offered fewer than

the prescribed number of hours for one or more program components, frequently the community service component.

- **All sites implemented the stipend and accrual account components**, although accrual accounts at DOL-funded sites did not bear interest. Enrollees at those sites did not receive regular statements of their accrual accounts. Most sites implemented bonuses for enrollees who achieved major program milestones.
- **Most sites supplied many of the most commonly needed supportive services, including afternoon snacks and transportation to program activities. On the other hand, most sites did not meet their enrollees' need for child care, health and mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and family counseling.** Future comprehensive programs like QOP may consider placing greater emphasis on referring enrollees who have these needs to community organizations that specialize in these services.
- **On average, enrollees spent 23 percent of the goal of 750 hours of program activities per year over the first four years of the demonstration.** The proportion of inactive enrollees grew from 1 percent in the first year to 36 percent in the fourth year. This suggests that the goal of 750 hours per year is unrealistic for this target group and that future programs may consider setting a lower goal.
- **The total QOP expenditure per enrollee averaged \$25,000 for the full five years of the demonstration.** The five-year expenditure per enrollee for the DOL-funded sites ranged from \$18,000 to \$22,000. For the two Ford-funded sites, the expenditure per enrollee was \$23,000 in Yakima and \$49,000 in Philadelphia. Thus, Philadelphia had a much higher expenditure per enrollee than any other site.