

# What Works Clearinghouse



## Service and Conservation Corps

### Program Description<sup>1</sup>

*Service and Conservation Corps* engages young adults in full-time community service, job training, and educational activities. The program serves youth who are typically between the ages of 17 and 26 and who have dropped out of school, been involved with the criminal justice system, or face other barriers to success. Participants are organized into small crews that carry out environmental and energy conservation, urban infrastructure improvement, and other service projects intended to benefit

local communities. These crews are guided by adult leaders who serve as mentors and role models. All participants receive educational training, in addition to a variety of job training and support services. Youth who have dropped out of school receive classroom training to secure a GED or high school diploma. Participants receive a living allowance while in the program. Those who complete the program are usually eligible for post-program educational stipends or small cash awards.

### Research<sup>2</sup>

One study of *Service and Conservation Corps* that falls within the scope of the Dropout Prevention review protocol meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. This study included 626 at-risk youths primarily between ages 17–26 who participated in community service projects in California, Florida, New York, and Washington state.<sup>3</sup>

Based on this study, the WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Service and Conservation Corps* for at-risk youth to be small for the completing school domain. The study that meets WWC evidence standards with reservations does not examine the effectiveness of *Service and Conservation Corps* in the staying in school or progressing in school domains for at-risk youth.

### Effectiveness

*Service and Conservation Corps* was found to have no discernible effects on completing school for at-risk youth.

|                         | Staying in school | Progressing in school | Completing school      |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Rating of effectiveness | na                | na                    | No discernible effects |
| Improvement index       | na                | na                    | -2 percentile points   |

na = not applicable

1. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly available source: the program’s website (<http://www.corpsnetwork.org/>, downloaded April 2010). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review. The literature search reflects documents publicly available by May 2010.
2. The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 2.0 (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Chapter III), as described in protocol Version 2.0.
3. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

## Additional program information

### Developer and contact

The *Service and Conservation Corps* is developed and distributed by the Corps Network. Address: 1100 G Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005. Email: [info@corpsnetwork.org](mailto:info@corpsnetwork.org). Website: <http://www.corpsnetwork.org>. Telephone: (202) 737-6272.

### Scope of use

According to the developer, the nation's 143 *Service and Conservation Corps* operate in multiple communities across 44 states and the District of Columbia. Annually, *Service and Conservation Corps* enrolls more than 29,000 young people who provide their communities with nearly 21.3 million hours of service in year-round and summer programs.

### Description of intervention

*Service and Conservation Corps* offers economically or educationally disadvantaged young adults the opportunity to participate in full-time community service, job training, and educational activities. The program aims to provide participants with the education and job skills they need to succeed, while completing projects that improve their communities.

Youth typically participate in *Service and Conservation Corps* full time and can remain in the program for 6 to 12 months. While participating, about 80% of their time is devoted to community

service projects, and the remainder to educational and other training and development activities. Participants are organized into crews of 8 to 15 youth that carry out projects designed to better their communities. Examples of projects include planting trees in urban areas, retrofitting low-income homes for energy efficiency, and restoring parkland. All participants receive educational training in addition to a variety of job training and support services. Youth who have dropped out of school receive classroom training to obtain a GED or high school diploma. This training is often offered through partnerships with local charter schools or community colleges. The topics covered are typically relevant to *Service and Conservation Corps* community service projects. Participants also receive an allowance, which is generally equivalent to or less than the minimum wage. Additionally, participants who complete the program are eligible for post-program educational stipends.

Funding for *Service and Conservation Corps* activities comes from a variety of sources, including federal, state, and local governments and fee-for-service projects in which sponsors pay some or all of the project costs.

### Cost

Based on estimates from Jastrzab (1997), the average program costs are about \$13,000 per participant.<sup>4</sup>

## Research

Twenty-three studies reviewed by the WWC Dropout Prevention Topic Area investigated the effects of *Service and Conservation Corps*. One study (Jastrzab, 1997) is a randomized controlled trial that meets WWC evidence standards with reservations. The remaining 22 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens.

Jastrzab (1997) used a randomized controlled trial design to examine the effect of *Service and Conservation Corps* on

youth primarily between the ages of 17 and 26 across four sites located in California, Florida, New York, and Washington state. Under this design, program applicants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that was allowed to enroll in the program or to a control group that was not. Although the combination of overall and differential rates of student attrition exceeds WWC standards for this topic area, the study statistically controls for (any small) differences between the

4. The WWC converted costs to 2009 dollars using the consumer price index.

## Research (continued)

analytic groups in gender, race/ethnicity, and several measures of degree of disadvantage and school performance.<sup>5</sup> The WWC based its effectiveness ratings on findings from comparisons of 626 youths: 383 of whom had participated in *Service and Conservation Corps*, and 243 control group youths who had not. The study measured outcomes 15 months after the youths had applied to the program.

### Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or medium to large (see the WWC Procedures and Standards

Handbook, Appendix G). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.<sup>6</sup>

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Service and Conservation Corps* to be small for the completing school domain for at-risk youth. The study that meets WWC evidence standards with reservations does not examine the effectiveness of *Service and Conservation Corps* in the staying in school or progressing in school domains for at-risk youth.

## Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for Dropout Prevention addresses student outcomes in three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school. The study included in this report covers one domain: completing school. The findings below present the authors' estimates and WWC-calculated estimates of the size and the statistical significance of the effects of *Service and Conservation Corps* on at-risk youth.<sup>7</sup>

*Completing school.* The study found no statistically significant differences between *Service and Conservation Corps* and control group youth in their self-reported rates of having ever earned a high school diploma or GED 15 months after program application. According to the WWC calculations, the effect size was not large enough to be considered substantively important according to WWC criteria (i.e., effect size of at least 0.25).

Thus, for the completing school domain, one study showed indeterminate effects.

### Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix E).

5. See WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Chapter III for a discussion of establishing equivalence in randomized controlled trials with high attrition.
6. The extent of evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept (external validity, such as the youths' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place) are not taken into account for the categorization. Information about how the extent of evidence rating was determined for *Service and Conservation Corps* is in Appendix A4.
7. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, when necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance, see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix C for clustering and WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix D for multiple comparisons. For the *Service and Conservation Corps* study summarized here, no corrections for clustering or multiple comparisons were needed.

## The WWC found *Service and Conservation Corps* to have no discernible effects on completing school for at-risk youth

### Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix F). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition and the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and

+50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results for the intervention group.

The improvement index for completing school is -2 percentile points for a single finding from one study.

### Summary

The WWC Dropout Prevention Topic Area reviewed 23 studies on *Service and Conservation Corps*. One study meets WWC evidence standards with reservations; the remaining 22 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens. Based on the one study, the WWC found no discernible effects on completing school for at-risk youth. The conclusions presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

## References

### Meets WWC evidence standards with reservations

Jastrzab, J. (1997). *Youth Corps: Promising strategies for young people and their communities*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

#### **Additional source:**

Jastrzab, J., Masker, J., Blomquist, J., & Orr, L. (1996). *Impacts of service: Final report on the evaluation of American Conservation and Youth Service Corps*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.

### Studies that fall outside the Dropout Prevention review protocol or do not meet WWC evidence standards

Albornoz, J. (1996). The New Jersey Youth Corps at Jersey City State College: A case study of urban young adult dropouts in a successful second-chance program. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57(11A), 275-4621. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.

Causey, K. A. (2002). Getting to work: Factors influencing sustained work performance by high-risk youth. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(05A), 216-2010. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.

Edelman, P., Holzer, H., & Offner, P. (2006). *Reconnecting disadvantaged young men*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Harris, L., & Bass, R. (1989). *An in-depth study of Michigan Youth Corps participants, subcontractors, and honor roll employers*. New York: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.

Ivry, R., & Doolittle, F. (2003). *Improving the economic and life outcomes of at-risk youth* (MDRC Concept Paper). New York: MDRC. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Lacy, G., & Yang, A. (1990). *Building Youth Corps*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Clearinghouse. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Lewis, A. (2003). *Shaping the future of American youth: Youth policy in the 21st century*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. The study is ineligible for review because it is

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- Michigan Youth Corps. (1988). *Michigan Youth Corps: Coming of age*. Lansing, MI: Author. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- National Commission on National and Community Service. (1993). Youth corps: Reconnecting America's youth. In *What you can do for your country* (pp. 63–84). Washington, DC: Author. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Partee, G. L. (2003). *Preparing youth for employment: Principles and characteristics of five leading United States youth development programs*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Partee, G. L., & Halperin, S. (2006). *Preparing youth for careers, lifelong learning, and civic participation: Principles and characteristics of six leading United States youth development programs*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Prouty, S. T. (2009). Achieving their potential. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 18(1), 37–40. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Prouty, S. T. (2009). Trails training opportunities: Corps provide training and career paths for young people. *American Trails Magazine*. Retrieved July 14, 2010 from <http://www.myvirtualpaper.com/doc/americantrails/Sum09ATM/2009072301/>. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Prouty, S. T., Sofer, E., & Karasik, J. (2009). *Civic Justice Corps: Transforming re-entry through service* (White paper). Retrieved May 12, 2010, from [http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/civic\\_justice\\_corps\\_transforming\\_reentry\\_through\\_service\\_comp.pdf](http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/civic_justice_corps_transforming_reentry_through_service_comp.pdf). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Prouty, S. T., Sofer, E., & Karasik, J. (2009). *Service and Conservation Corps and America's public lands* (White paper). Retrieved May 12, 2010, from [http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/service\\_and\\_conservation\\_corps\\_and\\_americas\\_public\\_lands\\_comp.pdf](http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/service_and_conservation_corps_and_americas_public_lands_comp.pdf). The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Prouty, S. T., Sofer, E., Karasik, J., & Stankorb, S. (2009). *The Clean Energy Service Corps* (White paper). Retrieved May 12, 2010, from [http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/the\\_clean\\_energy\\_service\\_corps\\_comp.pdf](http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/the_clean_energy_service_corps_comp.pdf). The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Prouty, S. T., Sofer, E., Karasik, J., & Stankorb, S. (2010). *Corps: Jobs today, a lifetime of employment tomorrow* (White paper). Retrieved May 12, 2010, from [http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/corps\\_jobs\\_today\\_a\\_lifetime\\_of\\_service\\_tomorrow\\_comp.pdf](http://www.corpsnetwork.org/images/pdfs/publications/corps_jobs_today_a_lifetime_of_service_tomorrow_comp.pdf). The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Rappaport, C., Jastrzab, J. & Falzone, S. (2003). *Promising practices for helping low-income youth obtain and retain jobs: A guide for practitioners*. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary

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analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Reynolds, K. M. (1993). A case study of a public-private partnership: The Mobile Environmental Youth Corps prototype comprehensive boot camp for juvenile offenders. *Masters Abstracts International*, 32(03), 114–853. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.

Sagawa, S. (2007). *Serving America: A national service agenda for the next decade*. Washington, DC: Center for American

Progress. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.

Wald, M., & Martinez, T. (2000). *Connected by 25: Improving the life chances of the country's most vulnerable 14–24 year olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Hewlett Foundation, Children and Youth Program. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.