

What is the community challenge?

When this study was proposed, reports from the Kids Count Data Center (<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>) showed a quarter of the children under the age of eighteen were living in poverty and a third lived in families receiving public assistance. In Wayne County, where Detroit is located, the percentages were, and are, even higher. More than a third of children were living in poverty, half receiving public assistance, and 15% of the labor force was unemployed (<https://www.bls.gov>). All these percentages were higher than the United States as a whole.

What is the promising solution?

GOALS (Gain Opportunities to Achieve Lasting Success) is an adapted version of the Family Check-Up (FCU) model, a strengths-based, family-centered intervention that uses motivational interviewing techniques to assist parents in the use of effective parenting practices in support of child competence. Focused on low-income families in Detroit, MI, GOALS was nested in a multi-agency integrated service delivery model which included a 2-1-1 information and referral hotline. GOALS families received the adapted FCU model and worked with a Family Check-Up Model Specialist (FCMS) who took them through a process where they completed assessments at 6-month intervals that identified their strengths and potential domains for improvement as well as those of their children. Families identified areas they wanted to strengthen and set goals they wished to attain through comprehensive feedback sessions. The FCMS recommended and helped families connect to GOALS pathway programs and other non-pathway services that could help them achieve those goals.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of the United Way for Southeastern Michigan's GOALS model by Philliber Research began in 2016 and finished reporting in 2020. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation and impact of the adapted FCU model - GOALS - among families recruited by five partner agencies in the Greater Detroit area. The implementation study included data collected via site visits, quarterly monitoring reports, end of study surveys, as well as administrative data. The impact study used an RCT design and data from standardized assessments to measure outcomes related to family self-sufficiency and child development, using regressions models. A total of 518 families were enrolled into the GOALS intervention and 474 families were enrolled into the comparison group.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, United Way for Southeastern Michigan engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate the GOALS model.

- The implementation evaluation found that GOALS model components were implemented with fidelity, including light-touch intervention with families, completing assessments, setting goals, and supporting families in identifying and using goal targeted services.
 - GOALS families showed significant gains in parenting. In particular, their levels of affection, responsiveness, encouragement, and teaching showed significant improvement at both six- and 12-month follow-up.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Gain Opportunities to Achieve Lasting Success (GOALS)

Grantee: United Way for Southeastern Michigan

Focus Area(s): Youth Development

Focus Population(s): Low-income caregivers with at least one child aged 5 years or younger

Community(ies) Served: Detroit, MI

- GOALS families also showed significant improvement on their ability to meet basic needs, parenting skills, social support, and behavior issues at both six- and 12-month follow-up.
- The impact study results showed that GOALS families outperformed the comparison families in some key areas.
 - GOALS families scored significantly higher than comparison families on social support at six-month follow-up.
 - GOALS families had significantly higher scores than the comparison group on the Feeding Your Child survey at both six- and 12-month follow-up.
- However, comparison families scored significantly higher than GOALS families on the ability to meet basic needs and on parenting skills at six-month follow-up, and on parenting skills at 12-month follow-up. It should be noted that the families in the comparison group were receiving services that would normally be offered by the partner agency.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, GOALS families were significantly more likely than comparison families to score in the low-risk category for the areas of Mental Health, Parenting, Family Connection, and Health Care.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact evaluation

Study Population: 18+ year old caregivers of at least one child aged 5 years or younger, who earned less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Line, and who lived within the tri-county region (Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties) at the time of recruitment.

(Independent) Evaluator(s): Philliber Research

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Moderate

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

Notes on the evaluation

United Way for Southeastern Michigan Evaluation of GOALS experienced several disruptions to their evaluation. Due to congressional sun-setting of the Social Innovation Fund program, the evaluation period was shortened and no continuation funding was awarded. The COVID-19 global health pandemic affected the last seven months of the GOALS evaluation. These disruptions prevented the grantee from enrolling the initially desired number of participants, and likely had adverse effects on outcomes of interest. However, in a supplemental study it was found that GOALS participation buffered many of the challenges faced by vulnerable families during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the assessments used to measure outcomes of interest were also used as key intervention activities. Control families received all but one of these assessments (which are not typically used in the participating agencies). This likely led to the improved outcomes for the control group.

How is United Way for Southeastern Michigan using the evaluation findings to improve?

The study revealed the difficulty families had in finding childcare in their communities. Leveraging funds from this project and others in service of their scaling and sustainability efforts, United Way has been able to create a new one-stop-shop to digitally house several GOALS pathways and support families in finding childcare called www.Connect4CareKids.org. United Way is embarking on the work to create a Community Information Exchange, or CIE, to help bridge the data divide between social services and healthcare partners and move from reactive information and referral to proactive social service navigation supports.

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.

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.