

Evaluation Report Brief

Youth Guidance: Becoming a Man (BAM)

What is the community challenge?

Preventing youth violence and improving educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged youth remain two of our nation's most urgent challenges – but, as a society, we have made little long-term, large-scale progress in addressing disparities in these outcomes. For example, differences in graduation rates between Black and White students have not changed substantially over the past 40 years (Heckman and LaFontaine 2010; Murnane, 2013). When it comes to test scores, gaps between high- and low-income youth have actually *increased* substantially since the mid-20th century (Reardon, 2011). And while there have been dramatic strides in addressing public health problems in America over the past 50 years, violence is not one of them, especially for young Black and Latino males. Nationwide, homicide is by far the leading cause of death for Black males ages 15-19.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Becoming a Man (BAM)

Subgrantee: Youth Guidance

Intermediary: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Middle and high school students in low-income areas of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system

Communities Served: Communities throughout Chicago, IL

What is the promising solution?

Becoming A Man® (BAM®) is an evidence-based, social-cognitive skill development intervention for youth, developed and implemented by the Chicago-based nonprofit Youth Guidance. BAM is an in-school program designed to help middle and high school aged youth develop non-academic skills and to promote meta-cognition (“thinking about thinking”) and deeper emotional connections. Through roleplay, counseling, stories, small group work, and homework, the intervention aims to improve educational outcomes and prevent violence involvement.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

This report summarizes the results of four large-scale randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of the BAM program carried out with thousands of students enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system. The evaluation of Youth Guidance's BAM program by The University of Chicago Crime Lab began in 2009 and is ongoing, pending completion of analysis from the most recent study year. SIF funding supported a portion of the RCTs conducted between academic years 2013 and 2015. Confirmatory research questions examined the effects of the program on educational outcomes and violence involvement.



What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Youth Guidance worked with the University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs to conduct an independent evaluation of BAM. Overall results show improved youth outcomes with respect to education and arrests for violent crimes, although the exact

magnitude and level of statistical significance varies across outcomes and across choices about when and how to measure program effects. To simplify interpretation of results, we present here pooled analyses across *all four studies* and aggregated outcomes:

- Results from the various evaluations show that on a whole, the program seems likely to have positive impacts for youth. These effects vary across samples and are sometimes sensitive to exactly how we aggregate information across the studies.
- Youth who participate in BAM show modest improvements in school engagement ranging in magnitude from 0.03-0.08 standard deviations. Program effect sizes are projected to translate into improved high school graduation rates of between 1.7 percent and 5.1 percent for participating youth.
- Participating in BAM reduces involvement in violent crime by 19 percent to 35 percent compared with the control group.
- Evaluators estimate that the overall benefit-cost ratio of the program, as calculated from returns to reductions in crime and improvements in predicted high school graduation rates, ranges from between 2:1 to 10:1, suggesting that the program is likely a worthwhile investment for policymakers.
- Researchers used all four studies to improve the overall sample size to estimate results; however, because program effects differ by study, study year, and sample, the pooled results mask a lot of variation in program effects.

For more information on individual study results published to date, please see [Heller, et al. \(2017\)](#).

Notes on the evaluation

Research questions related to the implementation study have not yet been addressed in BAM’s final report, as analysis is ongoing. These questions center on differences in program effects based on individual and school characteristics, fidelity of program implementation, and the broader school environment within which BAM operates. The research team plans to continue analysis for this evaluation in the upcoming months – including further investigation into the unexpected variability of the impact results.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Four large-scale randomized controlled trials (RCTs)

Study Population: Middle and high school students in low-income areas of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system

Independent Evaluator: The University of Chicago Crime and Education Labs

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*: Preliminary, based on the mixed nature of results and the small magnitude of effect sizes in the current report.

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



How is Youth Guidance using the evaluation findings to improve?

The research team is continuing to investigate underlying reasons for varying effects, with the goal of determining the conditions under which—and participants for whom—the program works best. Youth Guidance is now focused on utilizing evidence-based methods for ensuring high quality implementation as the program scales up. Future learning includes understanding how the amount of participation affects outcomes, identifying best practices for training and supporting BAM counselors, and understanding the underlying mechanisms leading to social-cognitive development.

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.