

# STRIVE

## A Summary of:

**STRIVE'S RESULTS: Evaluating a Small Non-Profit Organization in East Harlem**, Fall 1993, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service New York University, by Juliet Ofori-Mankata and Bo-Young Won

**EMPLOYMENT TRAINING: Successful Projects Share Common Strategy** (GAO/HEHS-96-108) May 1996, United States General Accounting Office

## Overview

Support Training Results in Valuable Employment (hereafter STRIVE), established in 1984, provides tools to successfully enter the job market to young adults who have experienced difficulty in securing and maintaining employment. STRIVE provides both attitudinal training and post-program support once participants are employed. STRIVE's objective, for 12 sites, is to place 2,500 individuals in jobs annually (an 80 percent placement rate for participants who complete the training program) and to ensure job retention for at least 2,000 of them (an 80 percent retention rate for those placed in jobs).

## POPULATION

Open admittance to persons 18 to 30 years old who express a need for STRIVE's services. The project targets individuals whose difficulty in obtaining employment stems primarily from poor attitudes and inappropriate behaviors. In 1994, STRIVE Central in East Harlem trained 415 individuals who were: 50 percent men, 50 percent women, 71 percent African American, 16 percent Hispanic, 34 percent receiving public assistance, 33 percent single parents, 64 percent high school graduates, 18 percent GED recipients. STRIVE programs are located in inner-city areas and often serve public assistance recipients, social service income recipients, individuals whose parents constitute the working poor, and persons with criminal records.

## Evidence of Effectiveness

Researchers from NYU and the General Accounting Office provided the following information on dropout rates, job placement, and job retention.

- ◆ NYU evaluators examined two dropout rates: (1) the number of individuals who, upon registering and attending the orientation, decided to leave the program after the first day— usually because STRIVE is not the traditional employment skills development program they expected (40 percent); (2) those who leave after they are well informed about the nature of the program and its requirements and had begun to participate (5 percent).
- ◆ GAO reports that from May 1985 through December 1994, the East Harlem STRIVE site helped 2,424 individuals secure employment. According to project officials, nearly 80 percent of those individuals maintained employment. In 1994, STRIVE Central trained 415 persons, 318 (77 percent) of whom were placed in employment (figures not independently verified.)
- ◆ NYU reports that from 1991 to 1993, on average, 82 percent of all participants had been employed for at least two years.
- ◆ Additional information was gathered from interviews with three employers and survey responses from 11 employers which had consistently hired STRIVE participants:
  - ◆ 63 percent had a relationship with STRIVE for an average of one to two years (relationships ranged from six months to eight years)

- ◆ 90 percent identified attitudinal qualities as the strengths of their STRIVE employees and indicated that STRIVE participants had moderate to high levels of motivation
- ◆ 55 percent indicated that STRIVE prepared its clients “well” or “very well” for positions in their organizations
- ◆ 66 percent felt that STRIVE could better assist participants through follow-up services and encouraging them to aspire to positions beyond the entry level

STRIVE is primarily privately funded, predominately through a grant from The Clark Foundation that requires a two-for-one dollar match from other sources, such as local employers. Services are free to both employers and participants. STRIVE officials noted that 90 percent of STRIVE’s resources are allocated to direct services. In 1995, per capita costs were \$1,500 for placement and \$1,650 for follow-up services (program director’s figures).

## Key Components

STRIVE is one of 18 programs recognized as exemplary by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) in 1996. (PEPNet, a program of the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC), is a nationwide network of youth employment/ development initiatives demonstrating high standards in the areas of: quality management, youth development, workforce development, and evidence of success. PEPNet offers organizations tools to analyze and evaluate their practices against identified effective principles and practices. Manufacturing Technology Partnership, pp. 30-33, is also a recognized PEPNet program.)

STRIVE is a privately funded organization with a ten-year history of emphasizing attitudinal training over job training. Its mission is to prepare, train, place, and support inner-city youth and young adults in long-term employment experiences and to demonstrate the impact that attitudinal training and post-placement support of clients have on their long-term employment. Both for-profit and non-profit organizations hire STRIVE participants who successfully complete the program, which is comprised of a three-week workshop, job development services, and follow-up services.

Three-week workshop:

- ◆ training intended to promote attitudinal change in:
  - punctuality
  - spirit of cooperation
  - ability to take constructive criticism
- ◆ testing in reading and mathematics
- ◆ if needed, referrals to remedial education or GED services

*“STRIVE’s training and placement approach differs from those offered by other non-profit (public and private) agencies supported by public funds, because of its emphasis on attitudinal needs of clients. Training stresses characteristics such as punctuality, spirit of cooperation, and the ability to take constructive criticism. For the purposes of acquiring successful employment, these elements are emphasized over skills such as typing, word processing, and data entry [included in STRIVE] but not to the extent that [they] are found in other employment training initiatives.”*

*New York University*

- ◆ moderate computer training
- ◆ exercises targeting development of verbal or written communication skills

Job development:

- ◆ individual assessment of job interests
- ◆ consultation on the prerequisite skills for careers/jobs that participants would like to pursue
- ◆ resume writing and interviewing skills

Follow-up services:

- ◆ once participants are placed in jobs, post-placement support for up to two years consisting of periodic phone calls to participants and employers to discuss experiences and assess job performance
- ◆ meetings with employers at their respective workplaces to discuss the progress of former participants
- ◆ problem resolution

STRIVE participants are employed in receptionist and clerical positions (29 percent), maintenance (10 percent), sales (12 percent), mail/shipping (12 percent), food service (7 percent), cashier (20 percent), teller (6 percent), and customer service (4 percent). Graduates have been employed by over 120 different companies in New York City.

## Contributing Factors

### *Attitudinal Training Model*

NYU: “Designers of the program believe that employers are willing to provide skills training for entry-level employees who have good attitudes and are willing to learn. The attitudinal model is optimal for STRIVE’s client population because it provides them with the skills ‘to get through the door,’ and to hold the initial job.”

### *No Better Training for Work than Work Itself*

NYU: “[D]isciplined attitudinal training in a ‘realistic’ work environment meets the needs of both potential employers and STRIVE participants ... The structure and content of STRIVE’s attitudinal training are intended to replicate the job experience. The attitudinal model forces young adults to: confront and correct self-defeating attitudes, develop effective communication skills and the confidence to migrate through the work environment.”

### *Individual Attention*

NYU: STRIVE “is structured so that each participant focuses on their respective strengths and weaknesses. Trainers maintain on-going reports on each client. They document client behavior and skills after each session, and discuss, on a one-to-one basis, each individual’s development. Training encourages clients to emphasize self-development over comparing themselves with other members of the training group.”

*“STRIVE encourages participants to shed the victim mentality, become self-sufficient, and acquire a solid work ethic.”*

GAO

### *Trusting Relationships*

NYU: “The program is structured to foster a relationship of trust between trainers and participants. It is expected that this type of relationship will facilitate a level of communication between [staff and] trainees that eventually will bring about change in personal attitudes. The resulting cooperative attitude, is perceived to be a powerful tool for clients to have; and it is regarded as a meaningful trait by the employers that hire them.”

### *Long-Term Follow-Up*

NYU: “The follow-up service that STRIVE provides its clients is the unique aspect of this program. We did not identify other employment training programs that provide this service for at least two years.” Researchers found that employers were not always aware of, and need to be better informed about, the follow-up services. Provision of these services can foster and maintain a high level of communication and interaction with employers, to the benefit of both participants and employers.

**STUDY METHODOLOGY**

Researchers evaluated the East Harlem STRIVE site using a diagnostic approach including collecting information about the organization's structure and purpose. They assessed the program through site visits, staff and participant interviews and surveys, including questionnaires mailed to 20 randomly selected employers of STRIVE participants.

**EVALUATION FUNDING**

*STRIVE's Results* funded by Ford Foundation.

**GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**

STRIVE's principal site is East Harlem, NY. It has been replicated in Pittsburgh, PA; Chicago, IL; and Miami, FL. Other sites are being developed.

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