



Rebound Workforce Development Program for Youth: Transferring Skills from the Basketball Court to the Workplace (June 2017)

Geography plays a major role in determining one's opportunity for health, well-being and future success. In East New York (ENY) and Brownsville, high-poverty Central Brooklyn neighborhoods, nearly one in four young people ages 16 to 24 are out of school and out of work, shut out from major avenues to stability, social mobility and success.¹ Good Shepherd Services' sports-focused Rebound program, which started in East New York and has expanded to Red Hook, strengthens participants' connections to their communities and to broader education and employment networks by fostering the personal and social skills required for success on a basketball court and helping youth to apply those skills in the workplace. **In FY 2015 and 2016, 89% of the young people entering Rebound were not employed and not in school at intake; by exit, nearly 80% achieved employment or accessed education as a result of the program.**

Workforce Skill Development at Good Shepherd Services

Good Shepherd, a youth and family development, multi-service organization with more than 80 programs in New York City, has a history of providing workforce development programming to youth through the agency's network of child welfare and school- and community-based programs. Good Shepherd has been a partner with the NYC Department of Education's Learning to Work (LTW) program since its inception more than 10 years ago, and has provided educational and vocational development through its foster care, supportive housing, youth justice and other school-based programs for years.



A Proven Approach to Engaging Youth and Strengthening Employment Readiness

For disconnected youth, the challenges of obtaining a job can be daunting. Some lack a high school diploma or GED, often closing off job opportunities that provide a living wage or the potential for advancement. Furthermore, employment tends to be "path dependent," meaning those with more working experience are more likely to work.² This creates challenges for youth eager to work, but lacking the educational and work experiences sought by employers. Recognizing the human consequences, lost promise, and financial costs to society that result from ignoring these disparities in opportunity, Good Shepherd works to break the cycle of negative outcomes for disconnected youth by investing in their potential. Our job exposure and training opportunities for youth and families utilize our strength-based, evidence-informed Youth and Family Development approach, which builds on existing competencies while recognizing the importance of setting high expectations, providing engaging activities, taking a holistic approach to youth and families and building caring and trusting relationships.

Results: Before participants are able to move on to employment or education, they must complete certain milestones in order to increase their chances of success. From the summer 2014 to the summer 2016 cohorts:

96%

received employment skills training

72%

received financial skills training

79%

secured a job interview/went through job hiring process



80%

achieved employment or accessed education

Components of Good Shepherd's Rebound Model

Rebound employs a unique approach modeled on Barclay's successful "Spaces for Sports" programs in low-income communities around the world. This approach harnesses a young person's passion for sports - in this case basketball - to teach critical leadership, job readiness, financial management and social-emotional skills, and ultimately open up linkages to broader learning and work opportunities that may otherwise have been inaccessible to disconnected youth. The Rebound model is built around several key components:

-  **Primary Person Approach:** Throughout the program, the participant is supported by a Success Coach - a Primary Person on staff with whom the participant develops an engaging and enduring relationship.³ The Success Coach is responsible for developing employer connections, offering job-related counseling through individual career success coaching, and getting to know the young people, their strengths and their areas of need.
-  **Sports-Based Youth Development:** In Rebound, basketball is used as a vehicle to teach young people critical social-emotional and life skills. The program's basketball coach creates a playbook that incorporates concepts applicable in the world of work such as taking direction, resolving conflict, being a part of a team and developing and following through on a plan. Basketball clinics are coupled with workshops, in which participants learn financial literacy, create

resumes, explore career options and prepare for job interviews. More recently, the program has added a dance/STEP component to broaden the appeal of the program beyond basketball. Research is emerging on best practices in the field of sports-based interventions, which reinforces a number of components of our Rebound model, including a safe environment, opportunities for skill-building on and off the court, and staff who help youth foster self-efficacy.⁴ While sports is a hook to engage young people, staff offer a number of additional enrichment activities, including local and out-of-state job site and college visits to expose participants to college, vocational training and careers.

 **Cohort-Based Approach:** Rebound runs three cohorts each year, putting a strong emphasis on community-building in order to facilitate the development of a positive peer network. Research demonstrates that belonging to a cohort of peers with a common purpose contributes to skill development and has a positive impact on persistence within a program.⁵ This sense of community is augmented by the use of Restorative Practices, which emphasizes the maintenance of positive relationships within a community.

 **Network of Employers:** Rebound’s full-time Success Coaches in ENY and Red Hook have developed strong networks of employer partners through which to refer youth for job placements. Rebound has placed youth at more than 130 different employers in the business/retail, nonprofit, government and media sectors. **Employers included: the NYC court system, Black Entertainment Television (BET), the NYC Sanitation Department, community nonprofits, like Man-Up (ENY) and Red Hook Initiative (Red Hook), and numerous other employers throughout NYC.** Rebound staff are primed to continue to build upon the network, given that we have hired Success Coaches from within our target communities who are familiar with the job landscape in the neighborhoods and can bring connections to local employers. Staff also have the advantage of being able to draw on Good Shepherd’s long-standing linkages and collaborations with corporate partners and nonprofits throughout the city.

 **Post-Program Support:** Lastly, the program involves a post-job placement component. Staff continue to work with young people as they begin their new jobs in order to improve job retention and satisfaction. Youth who have started a job participate in weekly “Snack and Rap” sessions, where they meet to talk about their job experiences and receive support from staff and peers related to issues such as job expectations. Staff also remain involved in helping young people to navigate common pitfalls to successful job retention, such as providing referrals to address issues related to child care and transportation.

Next Steps

Rebound is a part of Good Shepherd’s larger strategic shift toward building capacity in workforce development services. Good Shepherd opened Rebound Red Hook in 2015, extending the successful model to a neighborhood where we have had a long-standing presence. Rebound Red Hook joined a network of programming, including a transfer school, a Prevention program, a community center, and afterschool programs. The East New York Rebound site will be re-locating in the fall to Good Shepherd’s new, state-of-the-art community center, which will offer improved facilities and more opportunities for collaboration with co-located programs in the center.

Beyond Rebound, the agency has continued to expand into workforce development via additional programs, with a particular focus on sector-based employment programs. The agency now operates three sector-based jobs programs in East New York, South Brooklyn, and the Central Bronx.

“I thought (Rebound) was just to make myself better as a basketball player, but it made me better as a person. I can actually do something with my life. Something good for the world.”

-Rebound graduate

Who We Serve: Since the start of Rebound (summer 2014 – summer 2016), Rebound served:

203

youth in the fall (12 weeks), spring (12 weeks) and summer (8 weeks) cohorts

89%

were not in school and not working at intake

95%

of youth were ages 16-24 years, a critical time period when a youth transitions from school to work

Citations:

- 1 American Community Survey, 2014 1-year estimates, PUMS file.
- 2 Sum, Andrew, et. al. The Path Dependence of Teen Employment in the U.S.: Implications for Youth Workforce Development Policy. Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University (2007).
- 3 Youth Development Institute. Promising Practices in Working with Young Adults. (March 2008).
- 4 Perkins, Daniel, and Noam, Gil. Characteristics of Sports-Based Youth Development. New Directions for Youth Development, Vol 2007, Issue 115. (Fall 2007).
- 5 Drago-Severson, Eleanor, et. al. The Power of a Cohort and of Collaborative Groups. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Vol. 5, Issue B (October 2001).

Good Shepherd Services is a leading multi-service organization in New York City that operates over 80 programs in neighborhoods where children, youth and families face the greatest challenges to provide the support they need to succeed. To learn more about Good Shepherd Services, please visit www.goodshepherds.org. This report was written by the Program Evaluation and Planning Department at Good Shepherd Services. Rebound is currently funded entirely through private grants. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Barclays.