



The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe and Job ChalleNGe Program

Youth who drop out of school are at greater risk for job instability and lower earnings over time. Early involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice systems can increase the likelihood of youth dropping out of school. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced the availability of \$12 million in grant funds for the Job ChalleNGe program – a part of the comprehensive National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program – to include youth who were involved with the justice system and incorporate an additional job-training component. This program was authorized under section 171, Pilots and Demonstration Projects, of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The Job ChalleNGe (JC) program expanded and enhanced the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe (YC) program by providing a job skills component to program participants, referred to as cadets. Grantees provided academic and career preparation activities that assisted the cadets with career goal setting and understanding their long-term career and education pathway options. Participants were required to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test participate in a vocation interpretation of test results. Additionally, JC programs included career and academic counseling, work-based learning and exposure to the world of work, leadership development and employer engagement to ensure participants' skills aligned with employer needs at program completion. The military-styled, community-based residential program incorporated a yearlong post-program mentorship component aimed at building confidence, maturity and practical life skills.

DOL awarded JC grants to expand the YC programs with the focus on serving more court involved youth. The grantees were current YC programs located in Georgia, Michigan and South Carolina and served 900 youth over six cohorts. Youth ages 16-18, who were high school dropouts were eligible for the multi-phased intervention program. The YC programs consisted of three months of planning and 36 months of service delivery, which included an additional five-month robust job-training component.

The Department funded an evaluability assessment to determine the feasibility of conducting an evaluation of the impact of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program on court-involved youth and assessed the feasibility of evaluating the benefit of the Job ChalleNGe phase of the program. Mathematica Policy Research and MDRC conducted an evaluation that provides information on the DOL Job Challenge grants and the experiences and outcomes of participants including court-involved youth. This evaluation will be available in 2021 at:

https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/currentstudies/National_Guard_Youth_Challenge_and_Job_Challenge_Evaluation.htm