SITE PROFILE
Breaking Barriers, San Diego County, CA
by Lily Freedman

The Breaking Barriers program, based in San Diego, California, provided employment services to lower-income individuals with disabilities.
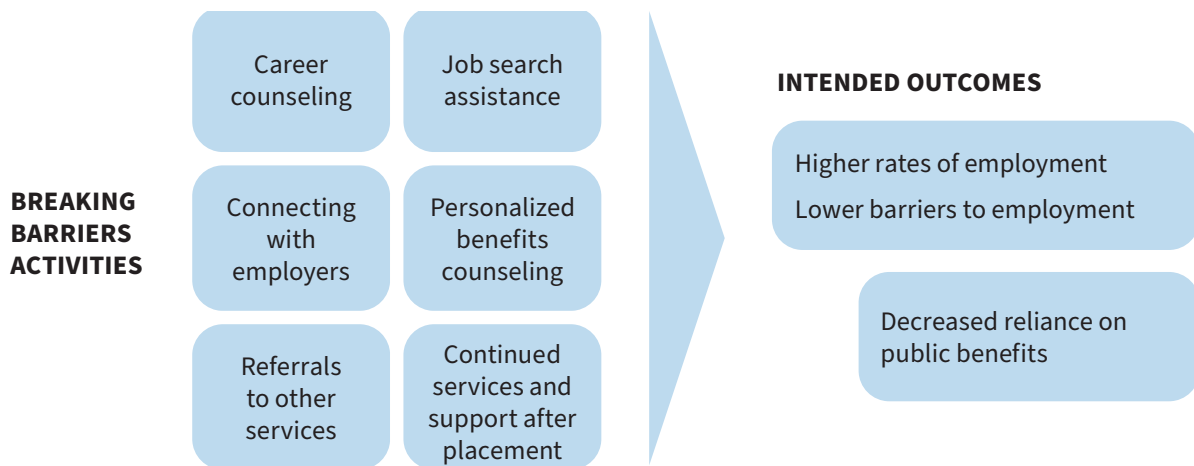
The program used the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. Originally designed for people with serious mental illness, IPS focuses on rapid job search and placement services, with support services integrated. It was developed in the United States in the 1990s and is well known, well defined, and well tested, having demonstrated its effectiveness in improving employment outcomes for participants in several studies. Though most of these studies have involved groups with serious mental illness, more recently IPS has been used with other populations who have a range of disabilities and conditions, as was the case in Breaking Barriers. Policymakers and practitioners are very interested in understanding whether the model can be extended to other populations effectively.

With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Workforce Innovation Fund, the San Diego Workforce Part-
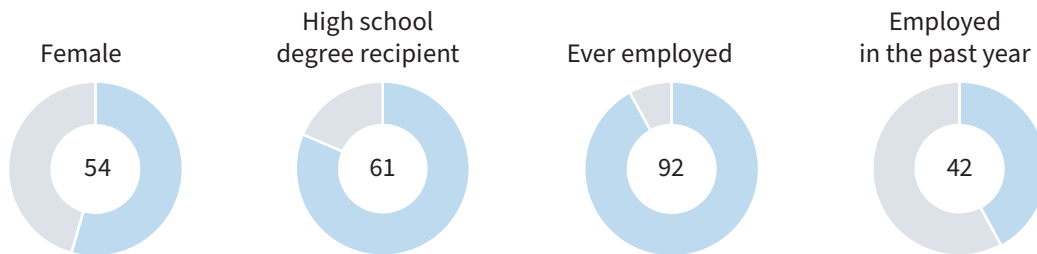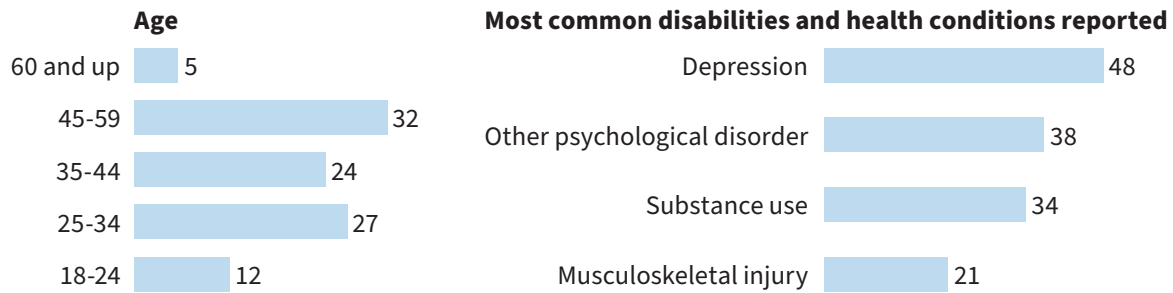
nership operated Breaking Barriers from January 2016 through June 2018 at four program locations in San Diego County. The program delivered various services in accordance with the IPS model. Breaking Barriers IPS activities were expected to increase participants' employment rate, lower their barriers to employment, and decrease their reliance on public benefits.

THE EVALUATION

MDRC, in partnership with MEF Associates, is conducting an evaluation of the Breaking Barriers program. The evaluation, also funded by DOL, includes an implementation study, a cost analysis, and an impact analysis. Through the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) project, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is funding additional follow-up data collection to extend the original evaluation and contribute to the IPS evidence base.

BREAKING BARRIERS ACTIVITIES

- Career counseling
- Job search assistance
- Connecting with employers
- Personalized benefits counseling
- Referrals to other services
- Continued services and support after placement

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Higher rates of employment
- Lower barriers to employment
- Decreased reliance on public benefits

Characteristics of the Sample at Study Enrollment (%)

Age

60 and up	5
45-59	32
35-44	24
25-34	27
18-24	12

Most common disabilities and health conditions reported

Depression	48
Other psychological disorder	38
Substance use	34
Musculoskeletal injury	21

Female	High school degree recipient	Ever employed	Employed in the past year
54	61	92	42

Adults eligible for and interested in receiving Breaking Barriers services were assigned at random to a program group offered IPS services through Breaking Barriers, or to a control group not offered Breaking Barriers, though they had access to other publicly available services. To be eligible, an adult had to be a San Diego County resident, have a self-identified disability, be unemployed or underemployed, and be a client of a referral partner.

In total, 1,061 individuals were randomly assigned between January 2016 and early November 2017 (528 to the program group, 533 to the control group).

LOOKING AHEAD

MDRC administered a survey to sample members an average of 15 months after they enrolled in the study, to measure differences in the outcomes of the program and control groups if any emerged. Findings on these differences, or "impacts," were published in September 2019, along with implementation and cost findings from the evaluation. The impact analysis found that there were no statistically significant differences between the program and control groups with respect to the primary outcomes measured — employment, length of employment, and total earnings — during the initial 15-month follow-up period.

As part of the extended data collection for the BEES project, MDRC will collect administrative records (records collected in the course of managing public programs) on Breaking Barriers study participants. Those records will include information on employment and earnings and may provide a fuller picture of the Breaking Barriers program's impacts. MDRC will release findings based on these analyses in 2021.

Timeline of Project Activities

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020

Program services
January 2016 - June 2018

Random assignment
January 2016 - November 2017

Time period covered by survey data
January 2016 - November 2018

Time period covered by administrative records
January 2016 - December 2019

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY