



The SourceAmerica Pathways to Careers™ Demonstration Pilot in Utah: Interim Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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Noelle Denny-Brown
Gina Livermore
Marisa Shenk
Eric Morris

Submitted to:

SourceAmerica
8401 Old Courthouse Road
Vienna, VA 22182
Project Officers: Brian DeAtley and Therese Fimian
Contract Number: INST-200901

Submitted by:

Mathematica Policy Research
1100 1st Street NE, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20002-4221
Telephone: (202) 484-9220
Facsimile: (202) 863-1763
Project Director: Noelle Denny-Brown
Reference Number: 06620-353

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [SourceAmerica](#) Pathways to Careers™ (Pathways) Initiative relies upon state-of-the-art customized employment strategies to enable people with significant disabilities to have an informed choice of competitive, integrated employment options that match their individual skills, interests, and abilities. Phase I of the Pathways demonstration was designed by SourceAmerica in consultation with Marc Gold & Associates (MGA) and is funded and directed by SourceAmerica. The pilot project was first implemented by the Pioneer Adult Rehabilitation Center (PARC) in Clearfield, Utah. As a SourceAmerica-affiliated community rehabilitation provider, PARC received a grant from SourceAmerica in 2011 to conduct a test of a planned national demonstration of Pathways. Service delivery at the Utah pilot project began in July 2012, after a year of development and training.¹ In 2015, Pathways was implemented at three new project sites with new implementation partners: Work, Inc., in Boston, Massachusetts; ServiceSource in Fairfax and Alexandria, Virginia; and JVS in Detroit, Michigan. Phase II of the Pathways demonstration will be implemented in 2018. SourceAmerica plans to expand Pathways to include up to four more demonstration sites in Utah in 2018.

Mathematica Policy Research was contracted by SourceAmerica to conduct an independent evaluation of the Pathways demonstration. The evaluation of the Phase I Pathways projects is based on a pre-post design in which participants' outcomes after they began participating in Pathways (measured at 6 months and approximately annually after project intake) are compared with their outcomes at the time of application, before they began participating in the program. Because the design does not include comparison groups, it cannot estimate causal impacts of the Pathways service model on participant outcomes. The evaluation findings presented in this report are based on information collected from the project management information system; participant applications and follow-up surveys conducted 12 and 24 months after intake; and in-person interviews with staff and employers participating in the pilot Pathways project in Utah. We also analyzed project cost information and data on how Pathways staff in the pilot project spend their time across various Pathways and non-Pathways activities.

In this report, we document the activities of the pilot Pathways project in Utah and the experiences of project participants from the time this pilot project first began accepting applications in May 2012 through December 2016, the fourth full year of implementation. During that time, the project enrolled 91 participants. This is the third of four primary reports that will describe the findings of the Pathways evaluation.

A. Pathways model

The key Pathways service components designed to promote informed choice of employment are (1) a Discovery process; (2) paid internships and work experiences during expanded Discovery, (3) on-the-job employment supports and mental/behavioral health services for participants (if needed), (4) a simulated employer payroll tax adjustment (EPTA), and (5) post-employment career support offered by Pathways staff members after a participant accepts a job offer. Additional services include case management and benefits counseling so that participants and family members understand how employment and earnings can affect their benefits. The

¹ We define program implementation as beginning with the date the first Discovery sessions were held.

Pathways service model was developed by SourceAmerica in consultation with Marc Gold & Associates (MGA). The model embodies the core elements of customized employment; namely a competency-based assessment of a person's strengths, needs, and interests and negotiation of job duties that are customized to suit both the person with a disability and the employer (WINTAC 2017). The model also emphasizes the contributions of each individual participant. The combination of customized employment service components, paid internships and work experiences, and the EPTA offered under the Pathways service model has not been implemented previously. The overarching goal of Pathways is for each participant to achieve meaningful, community-based employment. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Provide an informed choice of one or more internship or employment opportunities that match participants' strengths and interests; are compatible (or can be accommodated) with their communication, sensory, and social skills; and are designed to result in community-based, integrated employment.
- Support the active and continuing participation of employers that offer a wide range of integrated, full-wage internship and regular-status job opportunities.
- Identify and integrate employment supports (and behavioral/mental health services for participants, as appropriate).
- Provide ongoing support and assistance to participants and employers to ensure job retention and advancement.

This customized employment model was first implemented in Clearfield, Utah, starting in 2012 as a test of a planned demonstration of Pathways.² The four key service components implemented for the Utah Pathways cohorts analyzed in this report include the following:

Discovery. Discovery is a competency-based, qualitative look at the participant. Pathways staff members gather information about the participant in order to translate his or her strengths and life skills into job skills and into potential contributions to employers. During Discovery, Pathways staff also identify accommodations or employment supports that may help the participant achieve employment success. The objective is to develop a complete picture of the participant—one that goes beyond the types of assessments that would be conducted in a typical employment program. A second objective is to offer participants an informed choice of competitive employment options to inform their decision-making about internships or employment opportunities. Over the course of 10 to 12 weeks, Pathways staff members seek to identify each individual's best performance in his or her life by engaging the participant in approximately 10 to 15 Discovery sessions, each lasting one to two hours. The information is used to develop a foundation for the employment relationship. Discovery culminates with a career planning meeting, during which the career navigator facilitates a discussion with the participant and his or her family to identify the ideal characteristics of and environment for work.

² In 2011, the Pioneer Adult Rehabilitation Center (PARC) applied for and was awarded a grant from SourceAmerica to conduct a test of a planned national demonstration of Pathways. Following a year of development and training, PARC began accepting applications for Pathways in May 2012 and first implemented Discovery in July of that year.

The objective of the meeting is to develop criteria for internship or employment options that suit a participant's interests, strengths, and conditions for success.

Internships and expanded Discovery. During expanded Discovery, the Pathways participant can experience one or more full- or part-time internships or work experiences. The internships are typically for jobs for which the employers are seeking (or frequently seek) permanent employees at wages above the highest applicable minimum wage. Through the paid internship process, the participant and Pathways staff develop a greater experience base from which to make decisions about employment and a better understanding of a participant's career interests, conditions for success, and job-related contributions. These internships foster development of job skills and showcase the intern's abilities to an employer. Pathways provides the salary and fringe benefits during the internship. The Pathways team also identifies any internship and employment supports (for example, job coaching and training approaches) during Discovery and the expanded Discovery phases that are initially provided by the Pathways staff and then transitioned to the employer.

At the conclusion of the internship, Pathways staff develop an employment support plan with the active involvement of the participant and employer. This plan outlines the employment supports needed by the participant and their costs. The employer is also made aware of the EPTA, which the employer will receive if an offer of employment is made to—and accepted by—the participant. If offered a regular-status job by the internship employer, the participant may choose to pursue permanent employment with that organization, in which case Pathways staff would help him or her negotiate hours and wages. Alternatively, the participant may decide to explore another internship or employment opportunity.

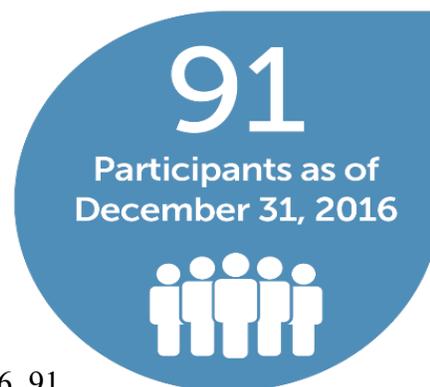
Employment and the EPTA. Another key component of the Pathways service model is employment in an integrated setting in the community (that is, not in a facility-based employment setting or enclave/group supported employment setting). If a Pathways participant accepts an offer of employment, the employer will be responsible for providing customary wages, fringe benefits, and all needed employment supports. Employers that hire Pathways participants are eligible for simulated EPTA payments ranging from \$167 to \$583 per month for each Pathways participant they hire who works and earns at least \$750 per month. Three EPTA amounts are available, depending on a participant's earnings and whether he or she is enrolled in a health plan sponsored by the employer. The EPTA amounts are based on estimates of how much money the federal government would save on programs for people with disabilities when a Pathways participant becomes employed. In the pilot project in Utah, Pathways will provide the EPTA to the employer for a period of up to five years from the date of the Pathways participant's employment, as long as the participant continues to be employed.

Post-employment career support. A final key component of the Pathways model is ongoing, post-employment career support. Once a Pathways participant has accepted an offer of employment, Pathways staff members continue to work with him or her to support the ongoing success and growth of the employed participant's career.

B. Recruitment and participant characteristics

Individuals are eligible for Pathways in the pilot Utah site if they are age 18 or older, have a primary diagnosis of an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and reside in Davis County, Utah. Pathways recruits participants from three sources: (1) PARC’s facility-based employment program, (2) the Davis School District transition programs, and (3) the waiting list for the Medicaid Community Supports Waiver for individuals with an intellectual disability or other related conditions.

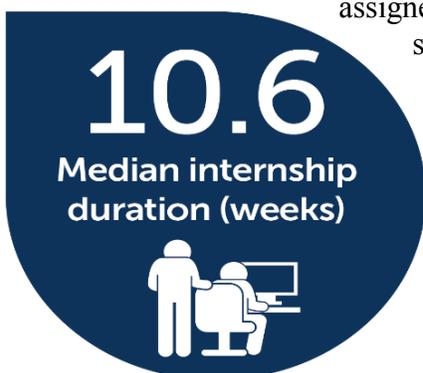
Recruitment for the first four Pathways cohorts occurred from 2012 to 2015. During this period, Pathways conducted outreach to more than 550 individuals from three referral sources, resulting in 169 applications, 161 of which were determined to be eligible applications. Offers to join Pathways were randomly extended to 83 of the applicants, of whom 79 accepted and 78 became formal participants by attending at least one Discovery session. Thirteen more were randomly selected as alternates after individuals declined to participate or dropped out of the project. As of December 2016, 91 participants had been selected and enrolled in the program.



The average age of participants was 28 years old, and most had completed high school or obtained a GED or certificate of completion by the time they applied to the project. About 60 percent of participants were male. At the time of application, about one-third were working and 43 percent were enrolled in school; among those who were working, most were working in PARC’s facility-based employment program (one of the pilot site’s three referral sources). Most were white, all had become disabled at a young age, and nearly 60 percent reported difficulties with activities of daily living (ADL). More than two-thirds of participants received Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits, typically Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (70 percent); only about one-quarter were engaged with vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. About one-half of participants lived in households with annual incomes of less than \$25,000. Although most participants saw themselves working in the future, only a minority had recent jobs at the time of application; among those who did, earnings were low, averaging about \$400 per month.

C. Services

Pathways participants spent an average of 17 weeks in Discovery, during which time their assigned career navigators helped them translate their unique life skills into job skills. After the career planning meeting, participants moved into the expanded Discovery phase of the project, during which they usually engaged in up to three internships. The median wait for matching to the first internship was 15 weeks and the average wait was 19 weeks. The long wait for internships was partly due to the fact that the degree of customization of internship and



employment options that is needed takes time. Also, Pathways staff encountered some challenges in finding appropriate internship opportunities; Pathways-affiliated employers could not always offer the range of internships necessary, so new employers had to be identified and recruited, and the employment facilitators had limited capacity to serve participants in expanded Discovery due to the size of the team. The median internship length was 10.6 weeks and the mean internship length was 10.2 weeks. The median time spent per internship was 123 hours while the mean time was 167 hours. A Pathways employment facilitator may have been present at an internship site for all the hours that a participant was there or for only a small fraction of these hours, depending on the needs of the participant for on-the-job support. On average, 30 percent of the internship time involved on-the-job support. Average staff on-site support time declined markedly after the first month of the internship.



During the first four years, 67 participants completed 130 internships, 46 of which resulted in offers of employment and 33 of which were accepted. Participants who accepted job offers worked an average of 27 hours per week and earned an average of \$9.65 per hour and \$1,124 per month. EPTA payments totaling about \$103,000 were paid based on the work activity of 16 of the employed participants. Pathways staff view these employment outcomes as successes; nonetheless, they identified some issues associated with participant employment. These include the degree to which many of the internships are customized for participants so that they matched their skills and interests, the need to provide significant on-the-job support to strengthen the soft skills of participants with severe ASD, the need to support participants with ASD who have sensory processing needs in the workplace, and the inability of employers to hire successful interns because the interns lack appropriate certifications.

D. Participant outcomes and experiences

We observed a sizeable increase in the share of Pathways participants working for pay at the 12-month and 24-month follow-up surveys compared with the employment rate at application. The percentage of participants working for pay rose substantially at the 12-month follow-up, from 34 percent to 60 percent (26 percentage points), largely because of participation in Pathways internships. Participants worked at those internships or jobs an average of 21 hours per week. The relatively high employment rate at application among the PARC-referred participants reflects those who were working in PARC's facility-based employment program when they applied to Pathways; one-third of applicants were employed. By comparison, the employment rate among all SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries with an intellectual disability is about 19 percent (Livermore et al. 2017). By the 24-month follow-up, 49 percent of survey respondents were working for pay compared with 36 percent at application (a 13 percentage-point increase), reflecting a smaller change than what was observed at the 12-month follow-up. Consistent with the higher employment rate observed at the 24-month follow-up, participants'



average monthly earnings increased by \$255 at 24 months relative to their earnings at application (from \$115 to \$370). This was accompanied by a \$178 reduction in average monthly disability benefits during the same time period.

E. Employer experiences

The efforts of project staff to build relationships with employers are vital to creating appropriate internship and work opportunities for Pathways participants. As of December 2016, those efforts resulted in 88 employers making formal commitments to participate in Pathways by providing internships and possibly paid jobs. Broadly speaking, the participating employers welcomed the opportunity to engage with their community through Pathways. The fact that the project would be shouldering the cost of paying interns plus the provision of the EPTA to eligible employers were factors in employers' decisions to participate. They also viewed the on-site support provided by Pathways staff as an important project feature that helped participants successfully onboard to their positions.

F. Project costs and benefits

A formal cost analysis of Pathways indicates that average annual per-participant costs are about \$12,000 (\$15,000 when selected overhead costs that may not be generally applicable to other programs are included). If we consider the costs incurred during the first 24 months of participation alongside the outcomes observed at the 24-month follow-up survey, we find that total expenditures generated monthly SSI and SSDI benefit savings equal to about \$9,400. If these savings approximate the impacts of the program, they would need to be sustained for roughly 11 years (14 years if overhead costs are included) for the program costs to outweigh the savings to SSA. Less time would be required for the program to be considered cost beneficial if savings to public programs other than SSI and SSDI accrue. Viewed from another perspective, if the 24-month outcomes observed to date are indicative of the potential impacts of the program, and if such impacts can be sustained, the average 25 percent reductions in SSI and SSDI cash benefits observed at the 24-month follow-up translate into average lifetime reductions of about \$44,000 per participant (present value). The average costs of serving Pathways participants from intake to employment among those who became employed to date (35 percent of all participants) was about \$24,000. Given the potential for large average lifetime public expenditures associated with SSI and SSDI beneficiaries with I/DD and ASD, substantial and effective investments in paid work experiences and career development might pay for themselves in the long run, especially if they are targeted to young adults who potentially have many years of dependence on public income and other support programs.

G. Conclusions

Although the Pathways pilot site can list many accomplishments during its first four years of operation, the project continues to face and address important challenges as it scales up. Intensive training on the Pathways service model is required of all staff; furthermore, it takes a great deal of on-the-job application of that training for staff to become proficient in conducting Discovery, matching participants with internships and competitive employment opportunities, and providing ongoing support. Staff turnover has also been problematic. Another ongoing challenge is finding appropriate internship opportunities for participants. Staff noted that the length of time it takes to find or customize a good match for participants frequently created

bottlenecks in service delivery due to the size of the team and growth in enrollment. This underscores the need for the project to continuously increase the number of affiliated employers and for staff to continue to be creative in working with employers to carve out or otherwise identify appropriate internship opportunities for participants.

Pathways is still a new and evolving customized employment service model that is designed to help people with significant disabilities achieve competitive employment. By providing participants with services *prior* to employment that tailor the employer relationship in ways that meet both the employer and participant's needs, barriers to employment are avoided because the job function is customized to suit the strengths, interests, and skills of the individual participant (MGA 2017). The findings presented in this report are only suggestive of the impacts the project might achieve on the informed employment choice, earnings, public income support benefits, and economic well-being of participants. As Pathways expands, there may be opportunities to more rigorously evaluate its effectiveness and potential to become a critical component of a broader strategy to improve the lives of individuals with I/DD and ASD and slow the growth in the SSI and SSDI disability rolls.

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