

First Year Insights: Implementation and Outcomes of Sacramento's My Empowerment Project



August 2024

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Submitted to

Sacramento County Department of Child Support Services

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About this Brief

In 2021, the Office of Child Support Services at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded a *Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting* demonstration grant to Sacramento County's Department of Child Support Services (DCSS). With this funding, DCSS implemented the My Empowerment (M.E.) Project. The project sought to educate teens and young adults about parenthood's financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities. MEF Associates is conducting a mixed-methods implementation and outcomes evaluation of the M.E. Project. This implementation summary brief describes how the County and its partners implemented the M.E. Project and the lessons learned.

The authors thank Shaun Edwards, Jennifer Maguire, and Janelle Bright at DCSS and Lisa Spiegler and Kimberley Key at BGCSAC for their collaboration on the evaluation as well as Asaph Glosser, Jeremy Rosen, and Imani Hutchinson at MEF for reviewing and providing feedback on the brief.

Early work on this project would not have been possible without the contributions of Dr. Bright Sarfo, who passed away in early 2023. Dr. Sarfo's voice was critical in charting a course for this project and ensuring that the approach elevated the perspectives of the communities served.

Suggested citation

Patnaik, A., and Heilman, B. (2024). *First Year Insights: Implementation and Outcomes of Sacramento's My Empowerment Project*. Arlington, VA: MEF Associates.

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Introduction

In 2021, the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded a *Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting* demonstration grant to Sacramento County's Department of Child Support Services (DCSS).¹ This grant sought to educate and motivate teens and young adults to postpone parenthood until they complete their education, start a career, and engage in a committed relationship. With this grant funding, DCSS implemented the My Empowerment (M.E.) Project, *My Life, My Journey, My Choices*. The project sought to educate teens and young adults about parenthood's financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities. DCSS collaborated with a community partner, the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Sacramento (BGCSAC), to educate and support youth in making informed decisions about postponing parenthood. DCSS contracted MEF Associates to conduct a mixed-methods implementation and outcomes evaluation of the M.E. Project. This implementation summary brief describes how DCSS and BGCSAC implemented the M.E. Project and the lessons learned. This brief is intended for policymakers and practitioners seeking to learn more about the successes and challenges of delivering such a program to youth in afterschool programs.

Program goals

DCSS wanted the M.E. Project to be a peer-to-peer, youth-centered, and youth-designed program. DCSS planned for the program to incorporate a youth advisory council and educate youth about the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood. DCSS planned for the M.E. Project to focus on African American and Hispanic youth since the adolescent birth rate among these adolescents in California in 2015 was 27 percent and 19.7 percent respectively, compared to 6.9 percent for their White counterparts.²

Program partners

DCSS selected BGCSAC in August 2022 to develop the M.E. Project curriculum and to design and deliver education and outreach to participants. BGCSAC is a non-profit that offers programs to youth through after-school and summer programs at twelve locations in Greater Sacramento. Their mission is to inspire and enable all young people, especially those who need it most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, and responsible citizens. Club programs cover education and learning; the arts; health and wellness; character and leadership; sports and recreation; and workforce readiness.

Program sites

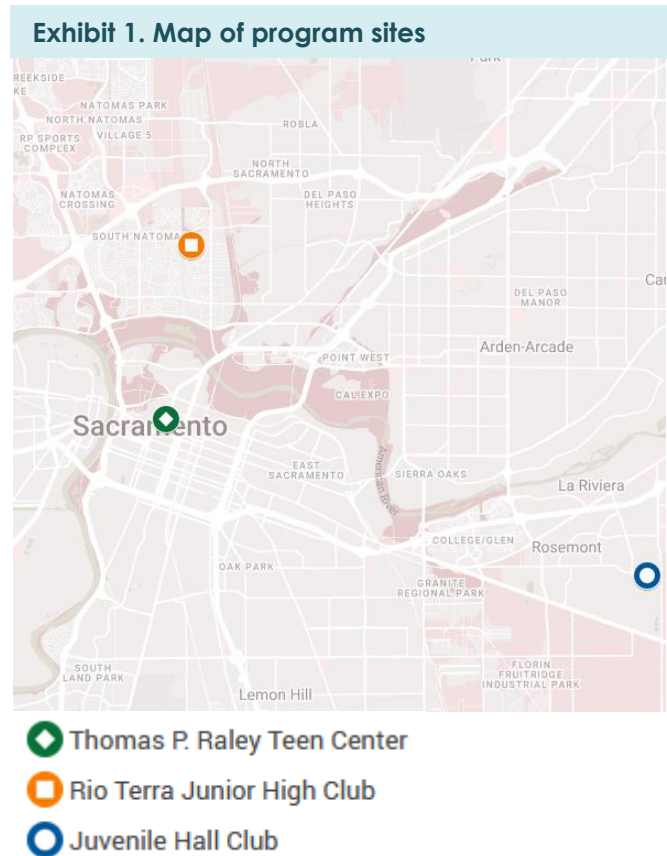
BGCSAC offers its programming to youth aged six and older at 12 locations in Sacramento County. Youth Development Professionals (facilitators) deliver the curriculum and facilitate implementation. In the first year of implementation, during the 2023-24 school year, BGCSAC implemented the M.E. Project at three locations that served youth in the grant's age range of 13 and older (Exhibit 1).

¹ OCSS awarded demonstration grants to child support programs in seven states and two tribes: California, Colorado, Louisiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Virginia, Washington, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians. These grantees formed the second cohort of the *Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting* grant program.

² California Department of Public Health (2017). *California's adolescent birth rate drops to another record low*. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/NR17-082.aspx>

Among youth who met the study’s age criteria at these sites, 87 percent self-identified as male, nearly half identified as African American, a fifth as Hispanic, and another fifth as multi-racial.

1. Opened in the Northgate neighborhood of North Sacramento in 2021, the **Rio Tierra Junior High Club** serves youth ages 6 to 18 with activities operating before and after school, Monday through Friday.³
2. Opened as the first freestanding club in September 1999 in the Alkali Flat neighborhood in downtown Sacramento, the **Thomas P. Raley Teen Center** originally served youth ages 6 to 18 but converted into a full-service teen center serving youth ages 13 to 18 in 2012 with activities operating after school, Monday through Friday.
3. Opened in the **Youth Detention Facility (YDF)** managed by Sacramento County Probation in June 2014, the **Juvenile Hall Club** serves all the facility's juvenile residents with activities operating after school, Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays. YDF is about ten miles east of downtown Sacramento and is the first point of interaction for most youth who enter the County's juvenile justice system; youth arrested, booked, and assessed as at-risk to the community are detained at YDF.



³ BGCSAC initially planned to implement the program at the Teichert Branch Club. Due to winter storm damage in early 2023 resulting in ongoing construction at Teichert, BGCSAC changed the location to the Rio Tierra Junior High Club.

Evaluation design

We are conducting a mixed-methods evaluation of the M.E. Project that examines participant outcomes and documents program implementation. The logic model in Exhibit 2 serves as a visual representation of the M.E. Project’s theory of change and outlines the project’s key components, including inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. The logic model informs our evaluation strategy and helps us identify key research questions, select indicators, and measure progress. This section presents the evaluation’s research questions and data sources.

Exhibit 2. Logic model for the M.E. Project

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
Grant funding from Office of Child Support Services	Youth advisor meetings	Tailored curriculum	Increased knowledge of parenting-related healthy behaviors and life skills	Increased knowledge of the importance of sequence building prior to making the decision to have a child
DCSS staff and expertise	Needs assessment	Video content	Improved financial skills	
BGCSAC staff and expertise	Selection of curricula	Outreach materials	Improved confidence in financial behaviors	Delayed adolescent or young adult pregnancy among the population served
Video firm staff and expertise	Creation of video content	Number of youth served	Improved attitudes about financial behaviors	
MEF staff and expertise	Outreach & recruitment	Number of classes conducted	Enhanced plans for pursuing higher education	
Youth advisors	Hiring of facilitators		Increased readiness for the career process	
Physical learning spaces at BGCSAC	Training of facilitators		Improved attitudes about the benefits of career planning	
	Delivery of curricula		Improved behaviors related to preparation for a career	
	Administration of pre-post surveys		Increased knowledge of the preparation for a career	
	Administration of compensation to youth			

Research questions

Research questions for the evaluation include:

1. How did DCSS and BGCSAC develop the youth-led curriculum?
2. What are the lessons delivered through the M.E. Project curriculum?
3. How are the M.E. Project curriculum lessons delivered?







4. What are the characteristics of youth receiving the M.E. Project curriculum?
5. What are the experiences of youth receiving the M.E. Project curriculum?
6. Is the M.E. curriculum associated with increased knowledge, improved skills, and improved attitudes related to parenting, education, career planning, and financial planning?

Our previous [research brief summarizing program design](#) addressed the first research question (Patnaik and Heilman, 2023). This brief addresses the remaining five research questions.

Data sources and collection

We are using both qualitative and quantitative data for the evaluation (Exhibit 3). DCSS tasked BGCSAC to collect most of the data and MEF to support the design of data collection efforts and analyze the data collected. Hence, we used a combination of primary data sources (where we directly collected data) and secondary data sources (where BGCSAC collected the data and transferred it to us for analysis).

Exhibit 3. Data sources for the evaluation

 <p>Document reviews. MEF reviewed documents including recruitment materials, lesson plans, and curriculum delivery schedules.</p>	 <p>Staff interviews. MEF conducted interviews with facilitators, managers, and key project staff.</p>
 <p>Program data. BGCSAC tracked program participation including demographics and attendance and provided this data to MEF.</p>	 <p>Pre- and post-assessments. BGCSAC administered the assessments to youth and provided the data to MEF.</p>
 <p>Focus groups. BGCSAC conducted focus groups with youth each quarter and provided de-identified notes to MEF.</p>	 <p>Implementation fidelity. BGCSAC monitored implementation fidelity through quarterly fidelity checklists and provided the data to MEF.</p>

Pre- and post-assessments

The evaluation team used a pre-post evaluation design to assess changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. In each quarter, the team used an assessment designed to measure changes related to the curriculum taught in that quarter.

- For Quarter 1, the team used the Parenting It's a Life comprehensive assessment developed by Iowa State University which measures knowledge and attitudes on healthy behaviors and life skills.
- For Quarter 2, the team used the Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory (CCRSI) which measures an individual's belief in their college and career readiness within four areas: college knowledge, positive personal characteristics, academic competence, and potential to achieve future goals.

- For Quarter 3, the team used the Career Launch survey developed by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America which measures knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors related to job search and career readiness.
- For Quarter 4, the team used the Money Matters evaluation survey developed by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America which measures knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors related to budgeting, saving, investing, managing credit and debt, and postsecondary planning.

BGCSAC administered the assessments at the beginning and end of each quarter. The pre-assessment was administered during the quarter's first session before any lessons were delivered. The post-assessment was administered during the quarter's last session after all the lessons had been delivered. Due to restrictions on technology use for YDF youth, surveys were administered on paper at YDF in all quarters. At Raley and Rio Tierra, surveys were administered using tablets in Quarter 1 and on paper in the remaining quarters. Every quarter, BGCSAC staff transferred the data from the paper surveys to an online database and then securely transferred the data to us for analysis.

Youth focus groups

The team conducted focus groups with youth at each site at the end of each quarter, typically in the week following the quarter's last session. Youth focus group participants were aged 13 to 25. Managers led the focus groups while facilitators took notes. The team held focus groups with 38 youth in Quarter 1, 50 in Quarter 2, 50 in Quarter 3, and 36 in Quarter 4. Raley and Rio Tierra focus group participants received an \$8 stipend, snacks, and prizes. In Quarter 1, we trained BGCSAC facilitators and their managers on focus group procedures, techniques, and best practices. We also helped develop focus group protocols about youth's program experiences. At the end of each quarter, BGCSAC shared deidentified focus group notes with us. We reviewed the notes and identified key themes, patterns, and recurring topics at the site level and across sites.

Staff interviews

We conducted a site visit at the end of April 2024 and interviewed three facilitators, a program manager, two BGCSAC administrators, and two DCSS administrators. A two-person team conducted the interviews with one team member leading the interviews and the other team member taking notes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with participant consent. Following the interviews, the note-taker cleaned the interview notes. Both team members independently coded the transcripts and then collaboratively clustered codes to identify themes, patterns, and recurring topics.

Program implementation

During the design phase of the grant, BGCSAC established a youth council, conducted a needs assessment, selected the curriculum, developed an implementation schedule, and trained and hired facilitators to implement the program (Patnaik and Heilman, 2023). During the first year of implementation, BGCSAC conducted outreach and recruitment and delivered the curricula.

Outreach & recruitment

The project team conducted outreach in the community to recruit participants through presentations, flyers at back-to-school events, and social media (Error! Reference source not found.).

Exhibit 4. M.E. Project recruitment flyer

MY EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

MY LIFE - MY JOURNEY - MY CHOICES

COLLEGE PREPARATION

FINANCIAL LITERACY

CAREER READINESS

LIFE SKILLS

Get Paid to Participate!

STIPENDS FOR PARTICIPATION AT THE END OF EACH PROGRAM.

For More Information:

LOCATION: RALEY BRANCH, G STREET
CONTACT: LEO VALENTINE
PHONE: (916) 840-6366
EMAIL: LVALENTINE@BGCSAC.ORG

Join us as we explore what it takes to achieve higher education, get on track for a promising career, and prepare for a successful parenting experience with a financially sound foundation.

*Must be 13+ years old to participate

DCSS
BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER SACRAMENTO
MEF ASSOCIATES

Recruitment at Raley and Rio Terra

At junior high and middle schools that serve youth eligible to participate in the M.E. Project, the team met with principals, health and life skills teachers, counselors, and students to introduce the program and build referral partnerships. The project team also met one-on-one with students who signed up to attend Raley’s after-school program to discuss the topics covered by the M.E. Project and encourage students to participate.

Recruitment at YDF

The project team did not conduct outreach or recruitment at its Juvenile Hall Club location since YDF staff selected youth cohorts to participate. At YDF, staff selected two youth cohorts from units with older residents and relatively lower turnover: 1) youth in the general population awaiting sentencing, and 2) sentenced youth in the Valley Oak Youth Academy (VOYA) program. Participation was optional for youth awaiting sentencing and mandatory for sentenced youth.

Curriculum delivery

The project team designed the delivery of the M.E. Project curriculum to focus on a specific topic in each quarter of the year. This aligns with the broader approach BGCSAC takes in structuring its programming quarters.⁴

Exhibit 5. BGCSAC programming timeline



⁴ BGCSAC has a “fun week” between programming quarters with no scheduled programming.

Each quarter’s programming included eight M.E. Project sessions. The project team selected lessons from the curricula chosen during the program design phase.⁵

- In Quarter 1 (September 5 to October 27),⁶ the M.E. Project delivered eight lessons from the Parenting: It’s a Life curriculum developed by Iowa State University for grades 7-12: Peer Pressure, Healthy Relationships, Risk and Protective Factors, The Cost of Raising a Child, Managing Money, Establishing Paternity, Co-Parenting, and Child Support.
- In Quarter 2 (November 6 - January 19), the M.E. Project delivered one lesson from the Love Is Not Abuse curriculum and seven lessons from the Diplomas to Degrees curriculum: What is Dating Violence, Lifestyle Reality, Exploring Types of Postsecondary Education, My College Planning Checklist, Show Me the Money, Culture Shock, Planning A College Budget, and Time Management in College.
- In Quarter 3 (January 29 - March 22), the M.E. Project delivered eight lessons from the Career Launch curriculum: What Is My Vision for the Future?, What Are Potential Careers?, Where Do I Begin?, How Can I Improve my Communication Skills?, How Do I Prepare for an Interview?, What Is Appropriate Work Behavior?, How Do I Create a Resume?, and How Do I Deal with Workplace Challenges?.
- In Quarter 4 (April 8 - May 31), the M.E. Project delivered five lessons from the Money Matters curriculum and three lessons from the SMART Moves curriculum: How Does Budgeting Help Me Reach My Goals?, How Does Saving Help Me Reach My Goals?, How Do Post-Secondary Costs Impact My Goals?, How Does Using Credit Wisely Help Me Reach My Goals?, How Can Investing Help Me Reach My Goals?, Healthy Boundaries, All the Feels, and Steps to Say No.

Youth received incentives for attending sessions. Raley and Rio Tierra youth received bundled incentives via checks at the end of each program quarter. The incentive amount ranged from \$8 to a maximum of \$48, depending on attendance. YDF youth received commissary snacks at the end of each session.⁷ YDF staff purchased commissary snacks using funds provided by BGCSAC; the funding amount varied based on program attendance numbers.

Challenges and adaptations

The project team encountered various challenges at the start of implementation. However, with our continuous improvement support, the team adapted quickly and successfully addressed some challenges.

- **Attendance.** In Quarter 1, the M.E. Project sessions were held twice per week at YDF, but different groups attended each program session resulting in each group only receiving half of the curriculum. However, the team restructured the YDF program in Quarter 2 to conduct sessions once per week so that the same group of youth could attend each program session.

⁵ Our previous [research brief summarizing program design](#) described the selected curricula in more detail (Patnaik and Heilman, 2023).

⁶ Programming at Raley and YDF started two weeks later than expected in Quarter 1. The team faced delays in finalizing staffing at Raley, while administrative delays related to curriculum approval by YDF leadership impacted the start date at YDF.

⁷ The commissary is a store within YDF where youth can purchase snacks, toiletries, and other personal items. YDF youth cannot have cash and can only make purchases using commissary accounts. Money can be deposited into these accounts by family members, friends, or through job earnings.

- **Timing of pre-assessment data collection.** In Quarter 1, Rio Terra youth completed the pre-assessments in the third week of programming, after they had received five lessons. Raley and YDF youth completed the pre-assessments in the first week of programming but had already received two lessons. The evaluation faces several challenges when participants complete the pre-assessment after receiving part of the program. Because youth have been exposed to a portion of the program, the pre-assessment does not accurately reflect their initial status before program exposure. Youth may respond to the pre-assessment based on their initial exposure to the program, which can lead to biased results. Because youth at the three sites took the pre-assessment with varying exposure to the program, combining their responses for the analysis was challenging in Quarter 1. However, the team adjusted their procedures in Quarter 2 and ensured that youth completed the pre-assessments at the beginning of the first session (before any curriculum was taught) and the post-assessments at the last session (after all the curriculum was taught).
- **Data entry.** Due to a technical glitch, participants' IDs were not recorded with the pre-assessment data at Rio Tierra in Quarter 1. As a result, we could not match pre- and post-assessments for these youth, resulting in a smaller analytical sample size for the analysis in Quarter 1. The team fixed the technical problem in Quarter 2.
- **Assessment completion rates.** In Quarter 2, only a quarter of all participants completed both the pre- and post-assessments. The evaluation examines changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors by comparing assessment scores for only those youth who complete both assessments; low completion rates of both assessments led to a reduced sample size for this analysis in Quarters 1 and 2. However, the team adjusted their procedures and successfully improved the share of participants completing both assessments in Quarter 3 (78 percent).

Evaluation findings

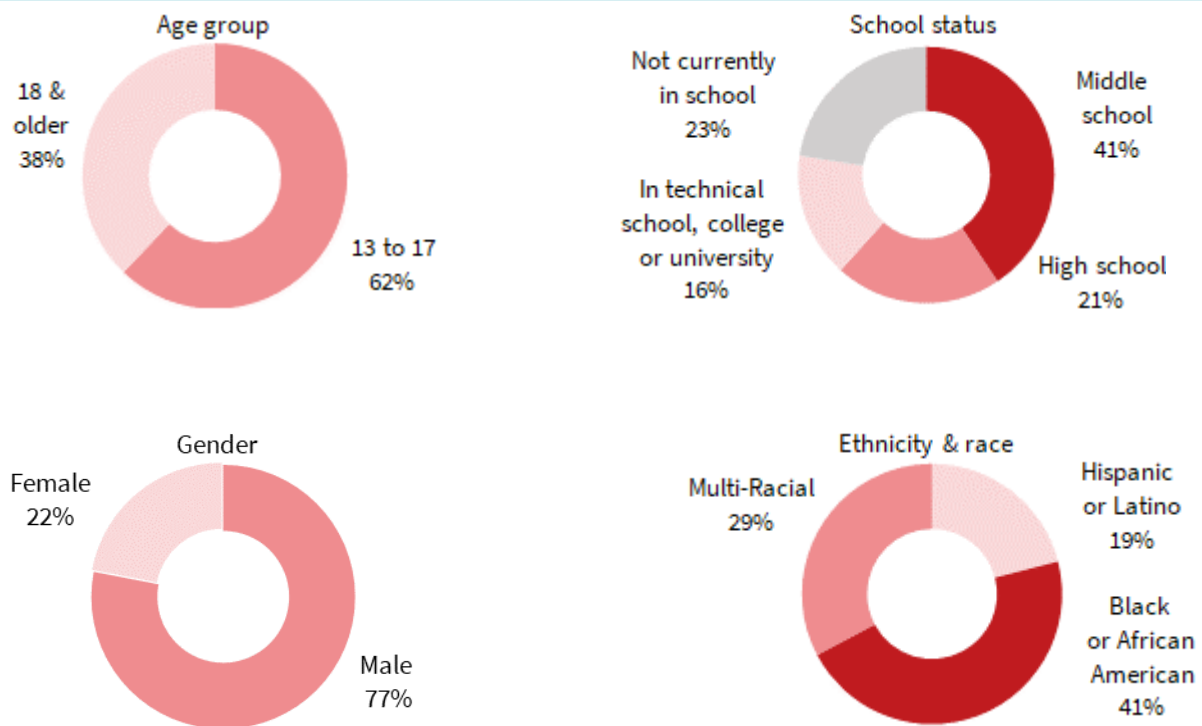
This section presents findings from our analysis of primary and secondary data collected during the first year of M.E. Project implementation.

Youth served by the program

The number of youth served by the program varied each quarter, ranging from a low of 54 in Quarter 1 to a high of 74 in Quarter 2. Overall, 142 youth received M.E. Project services from BGCSAC: 32 at Raley, 18 at Rio Tierra, and 82 at YDF.

Figure 1 reports the demographics of the 142 students who were asked about their demographics.⁸ The project serves youth aged 13 to 25. Nearly two in every five participants were aged 18 and older. Two in every five participants were in middle school, a fifth were in high school, and 16 percent were in technical school, college, or university. Nearly a quarter reported they were not currently in school. Over three-quarters of the participants were male. Two in every five participants identified as Black or African American, nearly a third as multi-racial, and a fifth as Hispanic or Latino.

Figure 1. Demographics of youth served in Year 1



⁸ In Quarters 1 and 2, demographics were only collected in the pre-survey. Thus, we do not have data on the demographics of the students who only completed the post-survey in Quarters 1 and 2.

Themes from youth focus groups

This section presents findings from our analysis of data from focus groups conducted by BGCSAC with youth at each site at the end of each quarter.

- **Recruitment.** The youth heard about the program through BGCSAC staff and other students. They were drawn to the program by the incentives. YDF youth also said they joined the program to spend time outside their unit and try something new.
- **Facilitators.** The youth reported a positive rapport with the facilitators.
- **Engagement.** Youth preferred group activities like role-playing over individual activities like reading slides and completing worksheets; they found group activities interactive and engaging. Exhibit 6 summarizes the topics youth identified as most valuable.
- **Learning.** Youth were confident about applying the college readiness, career readiness, and financial management lessons learned in Quarters 2, 3, and 4. They expressed low confidence in applying the parenting lessons learned in Quarter 1.
- **Suggestions for improvement.** Youth’s suggestions for program improvement included incorporating more group discussions and interactive activities and increasing incentive amounts.
- **Requests.** Youth also requested additional resources and referrals related to parenting; teen dating violence; post-secondary education options; grants, scholarships, loans and student debt; choosing a career path; budgeting; and, stocks, real estate, and business.

Exhibit 6. Most valuable topics identified by youth in focus groups

All Sites	Raley and Rio Terra	YDF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child support • Creating a resume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing • Preparing for college • Mock interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer pressure • Teen dating • Co-parenting • Health relationships • Career building • Time management • Communication • Work behavior • Goal setting

Program staff facilitated the focus groups, which may have biased youth’s answers. During interviews, program staff noted that youth seemed to be *“telling us what they think we want to hear”* and were not honest in their feedback, which could impact the validity of the results.

Themes from staff interviews

This section presents findings from the analysis of the staff interviews conducted during our site visit in April 2024. Following the site visit, we met with DCSS and BGCSAC to present recommendations for program adaptations drawn from these findings.

- **Program management.** Interviewees shared that staff turnover affected program design and implementation. An administrator noted it was *“challenging to start again with somebody new, assess where they left off, [and] loop someone in successfully.”*
- **Staff supports.** Implementing staff shared a desire for more training and opportunities for peer learning from other staff – *“to hear from peers would be helpful.”* They also shared that they were short-staffed on-site and felt strained with and unprepared for the burden of completing the management activities related to the program, such as tracking attendance, entering data, ensuring survey completion, and facilitating focus groups. They found it *“challenging ... to add the new layer on top of their other workload.”*
- **Recruitment and outreach.** Interviewees noted that the monetary incentives at Raley and Rio Tierra and the commissary at YDF were powerful recruitment tools. Staff’s connections to youth also helped in capturing attention and getting buy-in. Staff feel more prepared for recruitment in the coming year since they are familiar with the program and can speak knowledgeably about its benefits.
- **Attendance motivators.** Monetary incentives at Raley and Rio Tierra and the commissary at YDF were powerful attendance motivators, with staff noting that *“incentives kept students coming back.”* An interviewee noted that the exclusivity of the program also motivated students at Rio Tierra – *“it felt like almost an elitist club [where] they were doing something so cool and out of the norm, and it was just for this age group, and that helped them feel special in attending.”* Strong staff connection with youth also supported regular attendance since *“kids come back for the staff.”*
- **Structural barriers to attendance at YDF.** At YDF, many structural factors and strict rules affected attendance. For example, youth may need to attend court, may have visitation or other facility programs that conflict with the M.E. Project meeting time, or may switch units or leave the facility. Additionally, staff sometimes restrict youth from attending the M.E. program due to misconduct.
- **Curriculum topics.** According to staff, students seemed most responsive to content relatable to their current circumstances. Interviewees across all three sites noted that youth were interested and engaged in the modules related to careers and managing finances but were disinterested in the module on college readiness. Interviewees suggested that YDF youth were disinterested in the college readiness module due to limited opportunities available while incarcerated, while Raley and Rio Tierra youth were disinterested in the college readiness module because the end of high school seemed far away to them. One staff member shared, *“Right now, their world is just middle school.”*
- **Parenting module.** Interviewees noted that the parenting module interested youth at Raley and Rio Tierra but also seemed to shock them because they were young, and the topics did not have immediate relevance. One staff member said, *“Many students are not mature enough to take in all this information, [and] it's almost overwhelming for them.”*

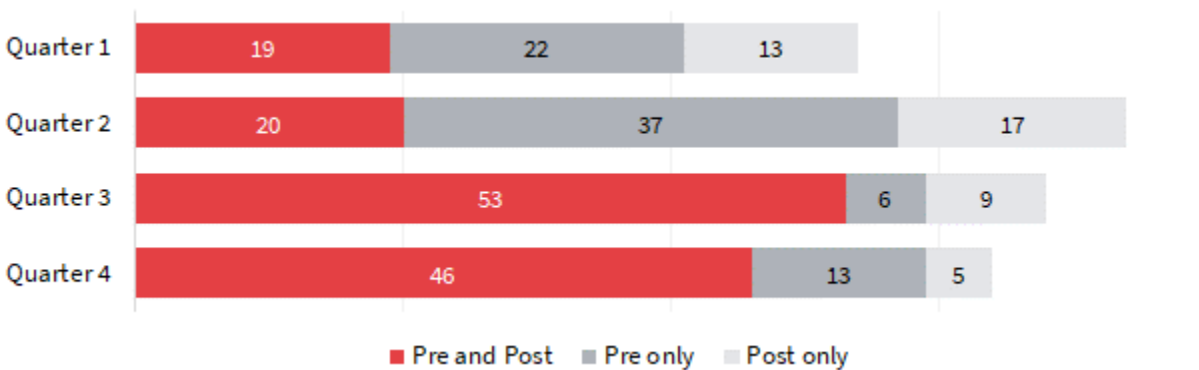
- **Curriculum order.** An administrator noted that the parenting curriculum was implemented in the first quarter based on input from youth – *“every single youth [we surveyed] said parenting first so they can think about it in the context of other modules.”* Some staff felt that because the program implemented the parenting curriculum in the first quarter, youth opened up early and discussed difficult topics; they felt this may have led to building trust and connections early in the program. However, other staff recommended moving this module later in the year as youth were too young to relate at the beginning of the year.
- **Curriculum facilitation.** Interviewees shared that staff often tailor the curriculum to the participants’ age and comprehension level. Effective strategies shared by staff include group work instead of individual activities, open discussions, hands-on activities like budgeting, and role-playing activities like mock interviews. One staff member worked with youth in the program to review lesson plans before each session and obtain feedback on whether the planned activities and examples were engaging and relevant.
- **Staff rapport with youth.** Interviewees shared that staff establish clear expectations and set the tone for meetings. *“If we didn’t have that, it would be complete, total chaos.”* They also shared that staff take the time to get to know and build connections with the youth; having strong rapport is important to facilitate discussion on sensitive topics and create an environment of trust where youth feel comfortable discussing these topics. *“The person providing that information should be someone that the kids feel connected with in some way, shape, or form.”* Facilitators shared a similar racial background as the youth they served and noted that this enhanced their connections with the youth. *“We have a lot of people of color in our site, so I feel like a person of color like myself must explain the importance of knowing this knowledge.”*
- **Parenting module facilitation.** Some staff found the parenting module difficult to implement because it was *“very personal”* and participants brought up thought-provoking questions that the staff could not answer. Interviewees noted that it was challenging to teach this module – *“as much as the students were learning, I was also learning how to teach it.”*
- **Facilitating at YDF.** Interviewees shared that youth at YDF engaged with the program despite their busy schedules and were reflective about their family backgrounds, concerned about their futures, and motivated to improve their financial situations after release. Many aspired to own businesses. Interviewees also shared challenges in implementing the program with YDF youth. One interviewee noted that YDF *“is not the right setting for this information.”* Staff shared that incarcerated youth face other challenges in their lives and this often means they are disinterested in and disengaged with the program.
- **Assessments.** Interviewees from two sites indicated that some youth struggle with the reading level of the surveys. Interviewees from two sites also noted that some youth don’t take the surveys seriously and respond by checking off answers without reading the questions. They felt that youth *“aren’t being honest”* and survey responses were *“not genuine.”* Another interviewee noted that the pre-post surveys are typically designed for the full curriculum, which can run as long as 25 sessions. Since the M.E. project uses a condensed version of the curriculum, the surveys have *“integrity loss.”*
- **Focus groups.** Interviewees shared some challenges in conducting effective focus groups. Program staff facilitated the focus groups, which may have biased youth’s answers. One interviewee felt that youth were not being honest in their feedback in the focus groups and *“they’re telling us what they think we want to hear.”* Another noted that the focus group

questions were repetitive and prompted yes/no answers without prompting the youth to elaborate.

Change in outcomes

We analyzed the data from the pre- and post-assessments that BGCSAC conducted each quarter to measure knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes related to the topic covered that quarter. The analytical sample included only those individuals who completed both the pre- and post-assessments each quarter. As noted earlier, the share of participants completing both assessments was low in the first two quarters, leading to a small sample size for the analysis in those two quarters.

Figure 2. Share of participants completing both assessments, by quarter



Parenting

We observed that the share of youth responding that they would like to have their first child at age 19 or younger decreased from 20 percent in the pre-assessment to 9 percent in the post-assessment (Figure 3), suggesting a shift in attitudes with youth favoring postponing parenthood.

Figure 4 examines changes in mean scores from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment for each Parenting: It's a Life module for the 19 youth who completed both assessments; increases in scores reflect knowledge gains. Our findings suggest no statistically significant change in scores. Note that the small sample size reduces our ability to detect significant changes.

Figure 3. Change in parenting attitudes on desired age when having first child

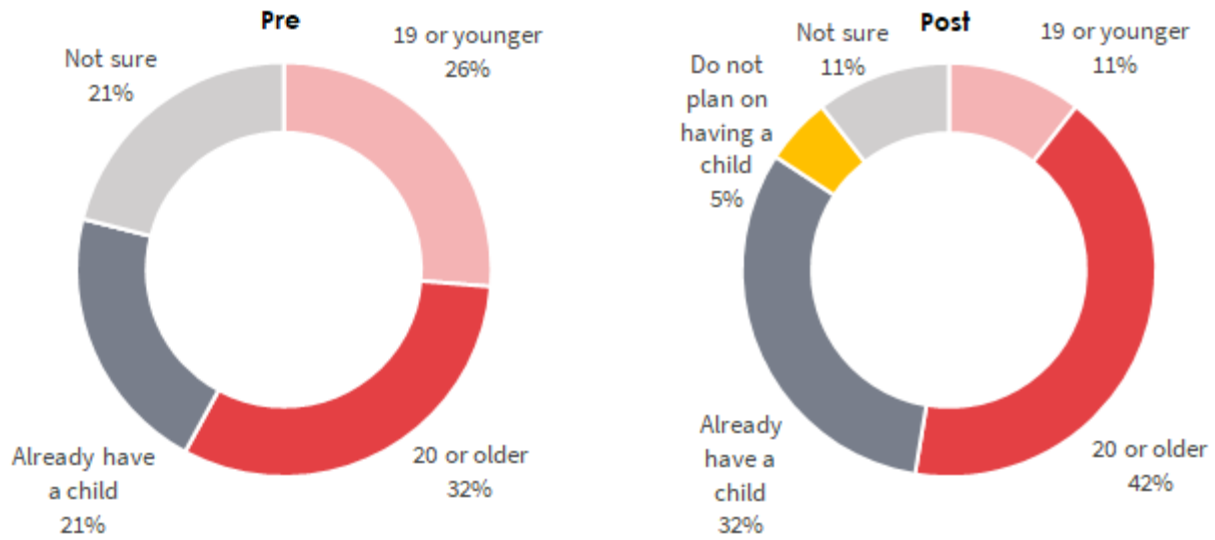


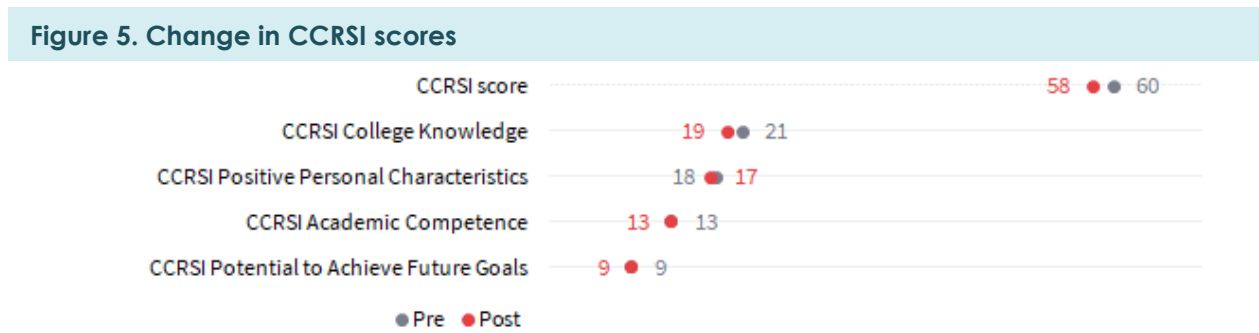
Figure 4. Change in Parenting: It's a Life module scores



College readiness

The Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory (CCRSI) measures individuals' belief in their readiness to begin studies in a career pathway and preparedness for success in entry-level post-secondary education settings. The CCRSI includes four factors. The College Knowledge factor measures readiness to meet procedural and financial challenges associated with post-secondary education and future careers. The Positive Personal Characteristics factor captures whether youth's positive personal characteristics will enhance readiness. The Academic Competence factor captures whether youth believe they have the competencies needed to succeed. The Potential to Achieve Future Goals factor captures whether youth believe that they have the potential to set and achieve future goals. A higher factor score indicates higher self-efficacy in that factor.

Figure 5 examines changes in the CCRSI scores from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment for the 20 youth who completed both assessments. Our findings suggest no statistically significant change in CCRSI scores. The pre-assessment scores shown in Figure 5 suggest that youth had high college readiness before receiving the curriculum. High pre-scores may indicate little room for improvement. Note that the small sample size reduces our ability to detect significant changes.



Career readiness

The *Career Launch* assessment asks about attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and knowledge related to career readiness. Figure 6 examines changes in career readiness attitudes and beliefs from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment for the 53 youth who completed both assessments. Our findings suggest no statistically significant changes in most indicators, except for a small decrease in the share of youth who agree that *“I know what my interests are and the kinds of things I like to do.”*

Figure 7 examines changes in career readiness behaviors from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Our findings suggest no statistically significant changes in most indicators, except for an increase in discussion about work experiences – 87 percent of youth in the post-assessment reported *“talking to a parent, teacher, club staff, or another adult about a possible work experience (paid or unpaid),”* compared to 70 percent of the youth in the pre-assessment.

Figure 8 examines changes in career readiness knowledge from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Our findings suggest no statistically significant changes in most indicators, except for an increase in knowledge about the importance of mentorship – 38 percent of youth in the post-assessment reported agreeing that *“finding a mentor is important as you plan for a career,”* compared to only 21 percent of youth in the pre-assessment.

Figure 6. Change in career readiness attitudes and beliefs

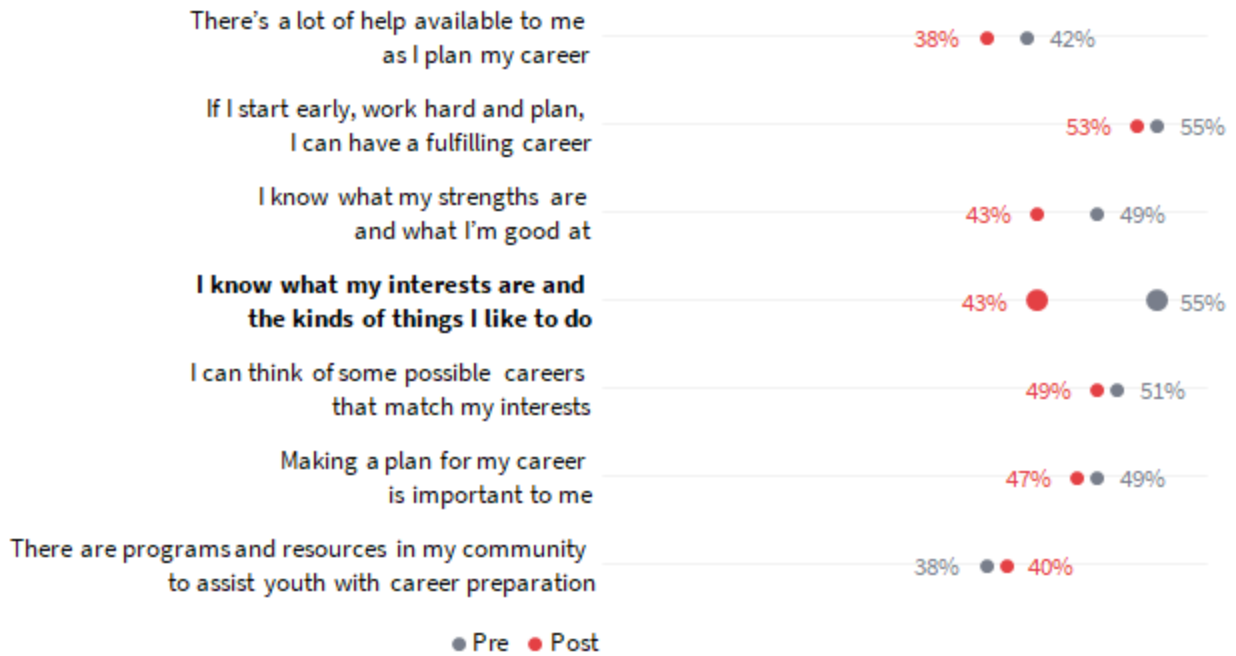


Figure 7. Change in career readiness behaviors

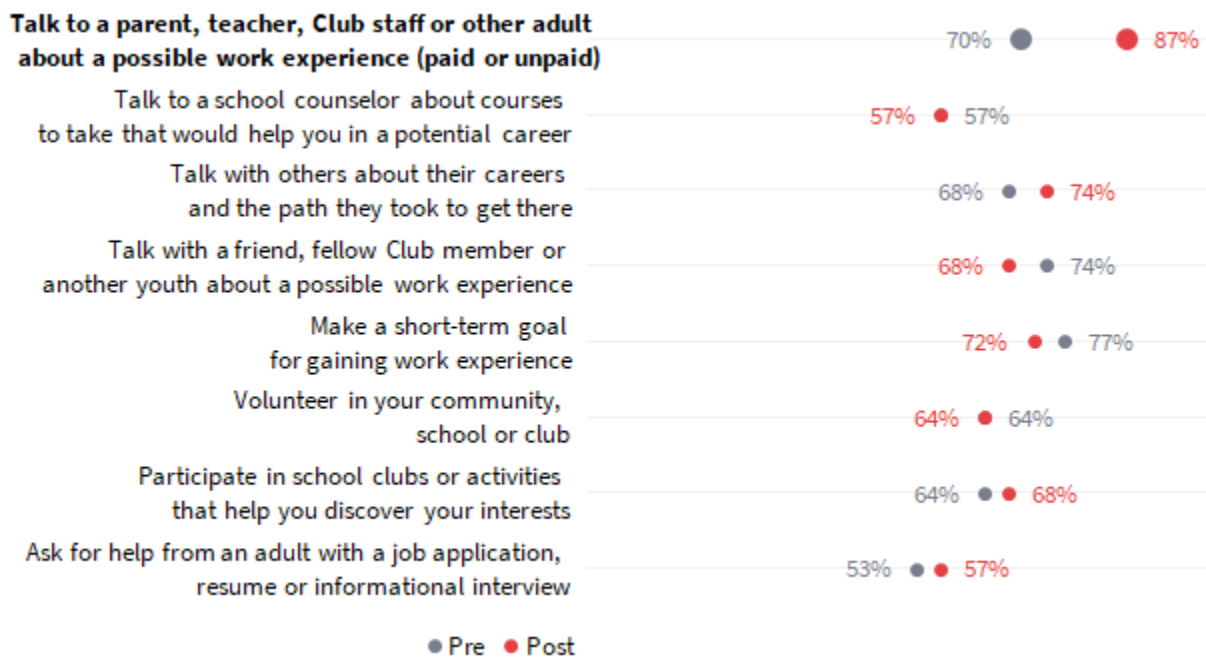
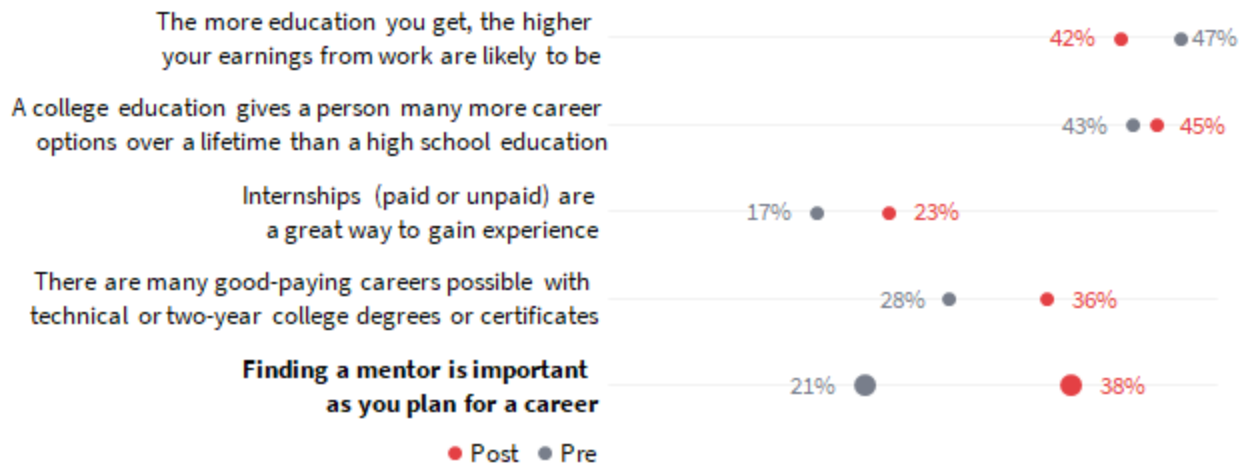


Figure 8. Change in career readiness knowledge



Financial management

The *Money Matters* assessment asks about behaviors, skills, and attitudes about managing finances. Figure 9 examines changes in financial management behaviors from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment for the 46 youth who completed both assessments. Our findings suggest a statistically significant decrease in the share of youth who reported setting short-term life goals – 70 percent of youth in the post-assessment reported setting short-term goals, compared to 89 percent of youth in the pre-assessment.

Figure 9. Change in financial management behaviors

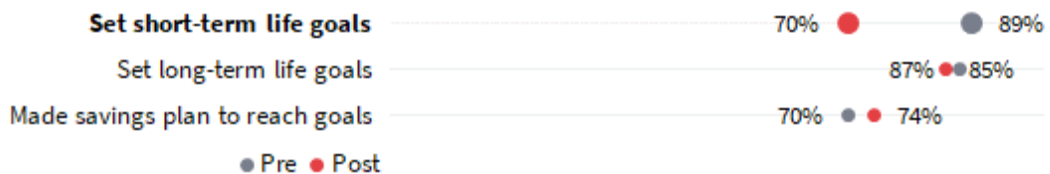


Figure 10 examines changes in financial management skills from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Our findings suggest no statistically significant changes in most indicators. However, our findings suggest an increase in the share of youth confident about saving money in a savings account and making a career decision that will help them reach their goals – 98 percent of youth in the post-assessment were confident about saving money in a savings account, compared to 87 percent in the pre-assessment, and 98 percent of youth in the post-assessment were confident about making a career decision that will help them reach their goals, compared to 91 percent in the pre-assessment. Our findings also suggest a decrease in the share of youth confident about someday investing money – 85 percent of youth in the post-assessment were confident about investing money, compared to 93 percent in the pre-assessment.

Figure 10. Change in financial management skills

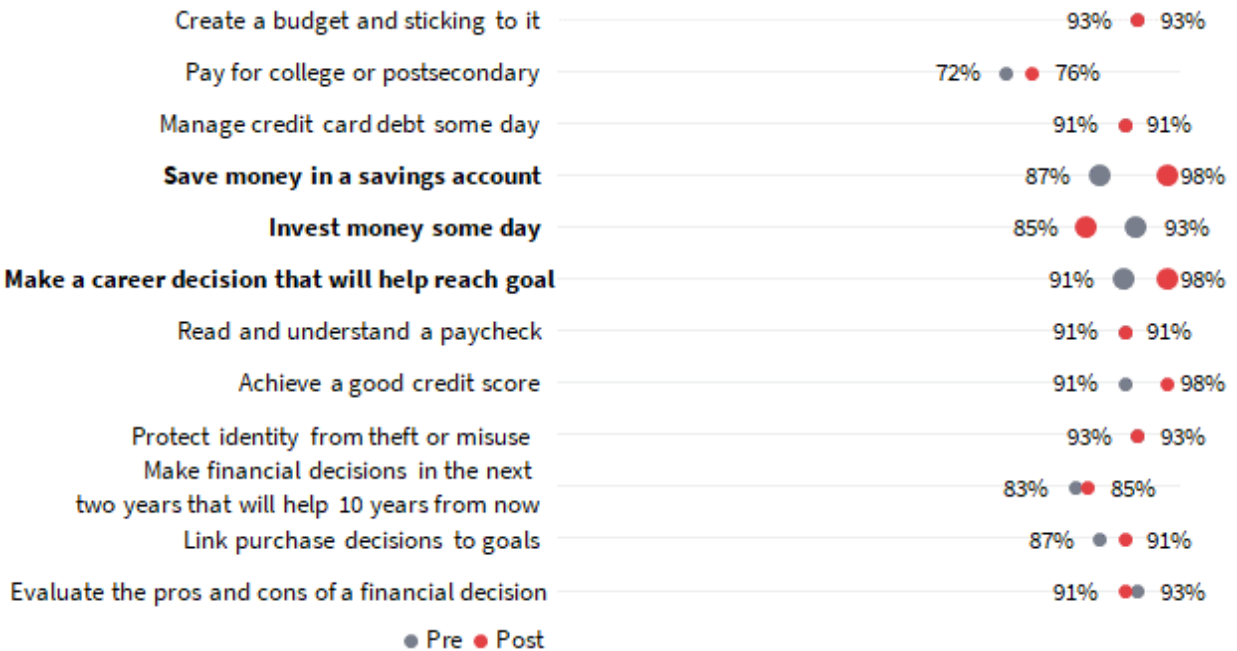
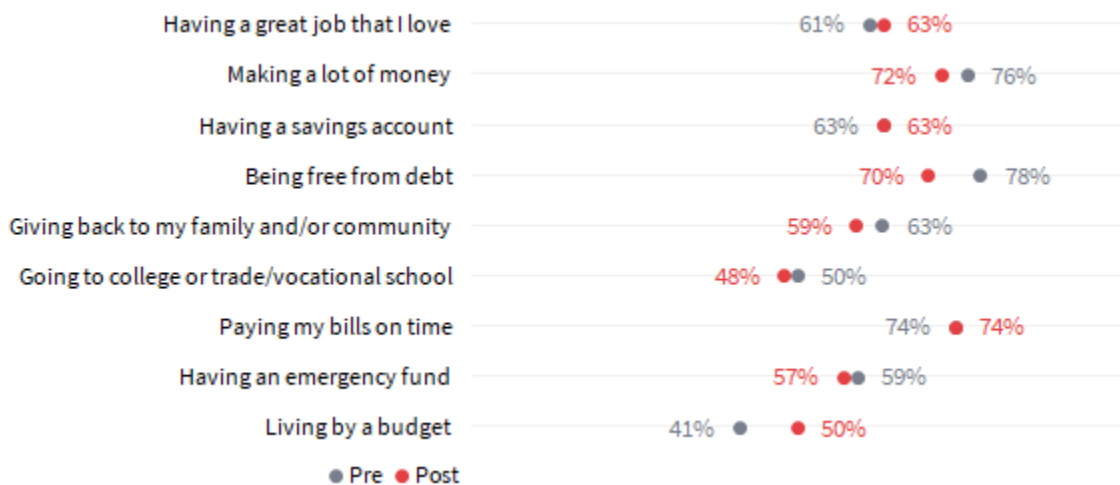


Figure 11 examines changes in financial management attitudes from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Our findings suggest no statistically significant changes in indicators.

Figure 11. Change in financial management attitudes



Discussion

During the first year of implementation in the 2023-24 school year, the project team delivered the curriculum to youth at the three sites. They also met their output goals of developing tailored curricula, developing outreach materials, serving youth, and conducting classes. While the evaluation found suggestions of knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes, the small sample sizes pose challenges to detecting statistically significant differences. Additionally, the pre-post single-group evaluation design makes it difficult to establish causality due to potential confounding factors such as baseline knowledge, socio-economic status, age, and access to external information.

The M.E. Project team is well positioned to build on the lessons learned from this first year of program implementation and educate and support youth to make informed decisions about success sequencing in the second year of program implementation. Evaluation findings at the end of this second year will help inform efforts to scale or replicate the program.