

Findings at a Glance

Evaluation of the Far Rockaway Economic Advancement Initiative

New workforce center model successfully provided comprehensive workforce services to community

The May 2019 Westat and Metis Associates report presents findings from an evaluation of New York City's place-based, workforce development program, the Far Rockaway Economic Advancement Initiative (FREAI). The evaluation examined the program's effectiveness at improving the labor market outcomes of residents of Far Rockaway, a geographically isolated neighborhood with high poverty.

This evaluation is composed of two components: 1) a qualitative implementation study that collected data through interviews and focus groups with FREAI staff members, Rockaway Center customers, employers, NYCHA tenant association leaders, and representatives of local community-based organizations; and 2) an impact evaluation that compares the outcomes of Rockaway Center customers to those of similar customers served by other Workforce1 Career Centers.

Key Findings

FREAI is a qualified success. This evaluation finds that FREAI was successful in providing a more comprehensive set of career services to Far Rockaway residents that resulted in an increased likelihood of getting a job, compared to people who received services at traditional American Jobs Centers. However, FREAI services did not necessarily translate into better earnings and employment outcomes, which were the same for Rockaway Center customers and for the matched comparison group after one year. Given that Far Rockaway residents were likely at a disadvantage relative to the comparison group due to the geographic remoteness and the high poverty of their neighborhood, these similar outcomes could indicate that FREAI was successful.

What is the Far Rockaway Economic Advancement Initiative?

Running from 2015 through spring 2018 with support from the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, FREAI was a program for the Far Rockaway, Queens, community that provided intensive career development services in addition to the standard workforce services provided at American Jobs Centers (called "Workforce1 Career Centers" in New York City). FREAI had multiple place-based design elements, including a focus on preparation for jobs in sectors with a strong local presence, on-site trainings, and targeting local customers who were historically underserved, focusing in particular on NYCHA residents. Unlike other Workforce1 Career Centers, the Rockaway Center was developed as a "one-stop shop" operated simultaneously by two organizations, one focused on job placement and the other focused on financial counseling and intensive job readiness services, including on-site training opportunities.

Additional Findings

FREAI provided job readiness and placement services to historically underserved individuals. Compared to the Workforce1 Career Center population, Rockaway Center customers were more likely to be African-American, NYCHA residents, have less than a high school diploma, and be on public assistance.

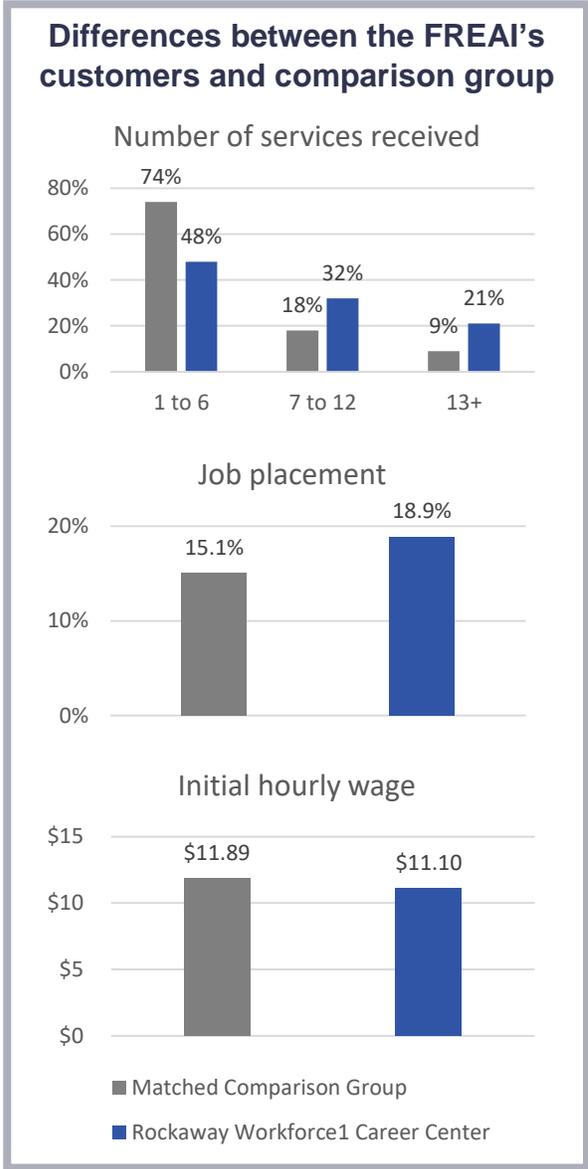
"The Rockaway Workforce1 Center provides a service that is needed in this community... People want to work but they do not have access to the tools and skills necessary to prepare for the job market. It has had a positive impact on the community."

-Employer in Far Rockaway

The partnership of the two providers was viewed as a highly successful element of the model, providing a seamless customer experience. This was made possible because of: (a) collegial and collaborative relationships between each provider's frontline staff, modeled by a strong partnership between each organization's director; (b) distinct provider and staff responsibilities; and (c) mutual information sharing toward the goal of an effective customer-employer match.

Rockaway Center customers received a greater number of services and were more likely to receive high-touch services, such as individual job readiness services, relative to the matched comparison group. The number of services received was strongly correlated to placement. Customers who received seven or more services were six percentage points more likely to be placed than those who received fewer than seven services, and those who received more than 12 services were 24 percentage points more likely to be placed.

Rockaway Center customers were four percentage points more likely to be placed in a job, worked three more hours per week in the initial placement, but had lower wages (by \$0.78 per hour) compared to the matched comparison group. Far Rockaway's relatively distressed economy may at least partially explain the lower wages, and achieving higher placement rates is a success. However, there were no noteworthy differences in employment and earnings four quarters after services were received between Rockaway Center customers and the matched comparison group. Differences in employment across the four quarters were either not statistically significant or too small to be substantively meaningful, and differences in earnings were not statistically significant.



Looking Ahead
 FREAI ceased operations in March 2018 – the standard Workforce1 Career Center services continued to be offered on-site – but Westat and Metis offer valuable recommendations for workforce development programming generally, and specifically for people who live in isolated geographies. These include replicating place-based models that employ targeted outreach and recruitment, and expanding individual job readiness and support services in other workforce programs. NYC Opportunity and SBS will incorporate the lessons from this work as they strengthen workforce development systems in NYC.

Further Reading:

- [Westat and Metis's evaluation of the Far Rockaway Economic Advancement Initiative \(2020\)](#)