

Promoting the Successful Transitions of Youth with Disabilities to Adulthood

Lessons from Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE)

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Executive Summary

PROMISE—Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—was a demonstration that generated sizeable evidence on transition practices and addressed many of the limitations found in the transition literature. The federal funders of the demonstration sought to improve the outcomes of youth receiving SSI and their families—outcomes related to employment, education, income and earnings, and participation in public assistance programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and other agencies.

The implementation and evaluation of the six PROMISE programs generated extensive knowledge about offering services to youth receiving SSI. In this report, we synthesize this research to identify its key lessons for the disability and youth transition fields regarding practices in the transition to young adulthood for youth with disabilities. We reviewed all of the articles and reports published to date related to PROMISE: 17 journal articles or reports from the PROMISE national evaluation and 33 journal articles or reports from the program-specific evaluations. This literature represents the sum of what has been learned from PROMISE to date.

From our synthesis, we identified lessons within the following four domains.

- **Confirming what we know.** Analyses of the PROMISE programs reinforced our understanding of youth transition programs in two ways. First, most youth receiving SSI had access to a range of transition-related services even in the absence of PROMISE. Second, implementing complex programs such as PROMISE is challenging.
- **New information about services.** The PROMISE demonstration provided new information for the field in three areas: (1) family service use, a novel component of PROMISE, was associated with youth service use, but had minimal impacts on parents' outcomes; (2) PROMISE programs used a variety of means to address difficulties in engaging youth and families in services; and (3) service use and impacts were no different for younger and older participants.
- **New information about outcomes and program cost.** PROMISE had positive 18-month impacts across multiple domains, reflecting consistency with its model. However, at five years after enrollment, two programs had youth employment impacts, and none of the programs had impacts on most other outcomes (though additional analyses conducted for the national evaluation detected evidence for some combinations of participants, programs, and outcomes). The limited program impacts after five years (when youth were ages 19 to 21) suggest that large investments in youth may be difficult to offset with immediate benefits.
- **Future directions to fill knowledge gaps.** The PROMISE findings point to four areas where we lack information about practices related to the transition of youth with disabilities from school to young adulthood: (1) the appropriate length of service access; (2) identifying which youth and families could benefit most from transition services and supports; (3) limitations of the evidence on what works for youth with disabilities to successfully transition to adulthood; and (4) youth and families' knowledge about SSA policies and work incentives.

These lessons, based on practitioner observations and comprehensive national and local assessments of the PROMISE demonstration, could bolster how new and existing programs offer and improve services for youth with disabilities and their families. These lessons could also promote how we assess the effectiveness of future programs for youth with disabilities.

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I. Introduction

The literature exploring the transition of youth with disabilities from secondary school to young adulthood is extensive, but most articles do not provide sufficient evidence of effectiveness and so are limited in their applicability. Recent reviews (Geyer et al. 2021; Schutz and Carter 2022) examining the evidence about employment interventions for youth with disabilities covered a broad spectrum of interventions and programs; they found that much research did not track long-term employment and education outcomes and presented only correlational evidence in support of an intervention’s efficacy. Of the 11 programs identified in another review, six did not generate sufficient evidence to determine the effectiveness of the intervention on youth employment (Urdapilleta et al. 2020). Without well-designed evaluations of programs offered to youth with disabilities, policymakers and practitioners cannot select the best interventions to support the ultimate success of youth.

PROMISE—Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—was a demonstration that generated sizeable evidence on transition practices and addressed many of the limitations of the literature. The federal funders of the demonstration sought to improve the outcomes of youth receiving SSI and their families—outcomes related to employment, education, income and earnings, and participation in public assistance programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and other agencies (Emenheiser et al. 2021). The six PROMISE programs implemented under the demonstration sought to improve service delivery at the systems level through formal interagency partnerships and administer a core set of evidence-based services to youth and families. The evaluation measured the employment, education, and other outcomes of youth and families at 18 months and five years post-enrollment to examine the impacts of program services.

The implementation and evaluation of the PROMISE programs have generated extensive knowledge about offering services to youth receiving SSI. Fifty articles and reports have been published on PROMISE to date, ranging on topics from building data systems, to improving interagency data sharing, to training staff to consistently and effectively deliver program services. The lessons learned from these studies can guide program administrators and practitioners in the design and implementation of youth transition programs and thus promote better individual and system outcomes.

In this report, we synthesize the research from PROMISE to identify its key lessons for the disability and youth transition fields regarding practices in the transition to young adulthood for youth with disabilities (Figure I.1). After briefly describing the demonstration and its evaluations, we consider what PROMISE has confirmed about what we know from the literature on youth with disabilities and their transition to young adulthood, and explore new information that has been uncovered through the demonstration about services and outcomes. In the final section, we discuss the gaps that remain in our knowledge of effective practices for the broader population of youth with disabilities and for youth receiving SSI specifically.

Figure I.1. Lessons from PROMISE



PROMISE = Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income; SSA = Social Security Administration; SSI = Supplemental Security Income.

II. The PROMISE Demonstration and Its Evaluation

PROMISE was a joint initiative of four federal partners (the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and SSA) to promote positive change in the lives of youth who received SSI and their families. Under cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Education (ED), six state agencies across 11 states implemented model demonstration projects (PROMISE programs) in which they enrolled SSI youth ages 14 through 16. Under contract to SSA, Mathematica conducted the national evaluation of how the programs were implemented; their impacts on the education, employment, and SSA program payments of youth and their family members; and their cost-effectiveness (Mamun et al. 2019; Patnaik et al. 2022a). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) provided support to the other two federal partners and the programs throughout the project.

The federal partners intended for the PROMISE programs to address service access challenges and poor adult outcomes experienced by youth receiving SSI (Emenheiser et al. 2021). Based on the literature, input from the public, and consultation with subject matter experts, the federal partners postulated that two key features of the PROMISE programs would make them more effective: strong partnerships among the federal, state, and local agencies that offer services to youth receiving SSI and their families; and an individual- and family-centered approach to case management and service delivery. Each program implemented five core components: (1) formal partnerships between state agencies, (2) case management, (3) benefits counseling and financial education, (4) career and work-based learning experiences, and (5) parent training and information. Each of the PROMISE programs established the required partnerships and implemented the core service components through approaches that reflected local experiences with youth receiving SSI, its understanding of best practices for serving youth with disabilities, and its familiarity with youth transition service environments.

Led by state social service agencies, PROMISE programs offered services to youth and to their families. ED announced the PROMISE cooperative agreements in September 2013, and the programs began enrolling youth from April to October 2014, with enrollment continuing through April 2016. All programs delivered PROMISE services through September 2018, and some delivered them longer. The six programs were implemented in Arkansas (Arkansas PROMISE), California (CaPROMISE), Maryland (MD PROMISE), New York State (NYS PROMISE), Wisconsin (WI PROMISE), and a consortium of six western states known collectively as Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment (ASPIRE). The consortium's six states were Arizona, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah. ED sponsored a technical assistance (TA) center at the Association of University Centers on Disabilities to support the programs during implementation.

The PROMISE programs enrolled more than 12,000 youth and families. Youth and families who enrolled in the evaluation of each program went through a random assignment process; half were placed in a treatment group, and the remainder were placed in a control group. Treatment group youth and families could use PROMISE services, whereas those in the control group could use only the services available in their communities and not PROMISE services.

The intent of the national PROMISE evaluation was to assess whether and how the PROMISE programs achieved their goals and whether the benefits of the programs outweighed their costs. The national evaluation included a **process analysis** for each PROMISE program to track activities during the first three years after enrollment, an **impact analysis** to show whether each program achieved the intended

improvements for outcomes within 18 months and five years after a youth's enrollment, and a **benefit-cost analysis** to assess whether the benefits of each PROMISE program are large enough to justify its costs. These analyses relied on administrative data, survey data, interviews and focus groups, and program documents.

The PROMISE programs also conducted evaluation activities separate from the national evaluation. The details of these activities varied, but in general the evaluations described services, processes, and outcomes using administrative data, survey data, and interviews. In some cases, programs used information from control group members as a comparison. The PROMISE TA center also compiled information across the programs.

For this report, we reviewed all of the articles and reports published to date related to PROMISE (Table A.1). This literature includes 17 journal articles or reports from the PROMISE national evaluation and 33 journal articles or reports from the program-specific evaluations. The subject matter of the latter is somewhat tilted toward two programs, WI PROMISE (the sole focus of 8 articles) and ASPIRE (the sole focus of 6 articles), whereas only one article focuses on Arkansas PROMISE. This literature represents the sum of what has been learned from PROMISE to date.

III. PROMISE Confirmed the Availability of Transition Services and the Successes and Difficulties of Operating a Transition Program

Analyses of the PROMISE programs have reinforced our understanding of youth transition programs by confirming the availability of transition services for youth with disabilities and documenting the facilitators and challenges in starting and maintaining transition programs. Below, we describe the evidence generated by the PROMISE programs in these two areas.

A. Most youth receiving SSI had access to a range of transition-related services even in the absence of PROMISE

In the first 18 months after youth enrolled in SSI, the service environment was relatively rich in PROMISE states, with a range of services available to all youth with disabilities even in the absence of PROMISE. At the 18-month evaluation follow-up, programs had increased the likelihood of service use for multiple service types, though no program had an impact on the total number of hours of transition services received by youth. Control group youth reported high levels of service use, with 90 percent using at least one service (Mamun et al. 2019). School transition planning was the most common service for control group youth, likely because schools provide this service for youth with disabilities with individualized education programs (IEPs), and almost all (74 to 93 percent) control group youth had an IEP. The percentage of control group youth receiving school transition planning services at 18 months after enrollment ranged from 61 percent in Arkansas to 76 percent in California (Mamun et al. 2019). Other frequently used services included life skills training and self-determination training (such as services related to autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization).

In addition to general transition services, control group youth had access to many services similar to those offered by PROMISE, although they used them less frequently than treatment group youth did. For example, at 18 months, the percentage of control group youth using employment services ranged from 36 percent to 54 percent across programs; the proportion of treatment group youth using these services was 12 to 38 percentage points higher (Mamun et al. 2019). Although treatment group youth were generally more likely to use case management, employment, benefits counseling, and financial education services (all required by PROMISE) than control group youth were, some control group youth also accessed these services. These services are available through schools, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, and workforce boards. The evaluation did not assess the intensity and quality of PROMISE-like services, only whether youth used them. PROMISE programs may have offered treatment group members higher quality or more intensive services in some domains (such as benefits counseling or employment) than those typically available to or used by control group members.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 may have affected the counterfactual environment during PROMISE implementation. WIOA increased youth training, service, education, and integrated employment opportunities (WIOA 2014, 29 U.S.C. 287). States began to plan for WIOA implementation during PROMISE program implementation, which could have increased the opportunity for control group youth to use services similar to those offered under PROMISE programs, especially for younger enrollees during the latter years of the evaluation.

B. Implementing complex programs such as PROMISE is challenging

The PROMISE programs extensively documented their successes and challenges in creating, implementing, and maintaining complex, large-scale transition programs. In Table III.1, we list the relevant articles and reports and their findings along nine topics: project startup, interagency collaboration, program management, staff development and training, data collection and management, participant engagement, fidelity to the program model, case management, and service delivery. Administrators and staff offering services for youth with disabilities might benefit from learning about and drawing on the experiences of PROMISE programs in these areas.

The breadth of topics and issues identified by the PROMISE programs point to their complexity, a complexity that could have limited their effectiveness for some youth. PROMISE, in this regard, may be no different than other youth employment programs; although most do not achieve their expected impacts, poor results may reflect the difficulty in successful implementation rather than something inherently wrong with the intended intervention (Kluve et al. 2016). Scaling these programs to connect and provide services across partner agencies and staff to about 1,000 youth offered abundant opportunities for the model to break down for any individual participant. Though the process evaluations generally found that programs delivered their intended services (particularly with employment and case management), the evaluations also found gaps in implementation. For example, MD PROMISE had potential issues with differing caseloads and participant engagement by region, variation in the familiarity of staff with community resources, and low take-up rates of services such as benefits counseling (Kauff et al. 2018). In addition, when the program made staffing changes, participants reported that they had to start over with program staff because the new staff did not know about their service histories. The information provided by the national evaluation through the process evaluation, along with the programs' efforts to track their fidelity, provided programs with opportunities to improve their implementation throughout their work. Variation in implementation within programs, which is no different from counterfactual service experiences, could result in youth and families having different experiences.

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“...[L]iving day to day with concerns about income, food and shelter insecurity make[s] it difficult to always follow through with program expectations. In addition, traditional training and service approaches did not always account for the hardships of poverty including trauma, basic needs, ambivalence, need for a hands-on learning, and meeting the youth and families where they were at. For these reasons, PROMISE case management included key features that helped to increase engagement in services supports, including bringing services and supports to youth and families and using effective outreach methods.... Case management was employment focused, strength-based with a focus on empowerment, and included person centered planning, rapid engagement, motivational interviewing, and trauma informed care.”

— Hartman et al. 2019, p. 177

Table III.1. PROMISE programs documented facilitators and challenges to creating and maintaining transition programs

Topic	PROMISE articles that address the topic	Findings or themes
Project start-up	Guentherman et al. 2020; Johnson et al. 2020	Building shared data systems and negotiating formal agreements requires time; establishing initial flexibility in service implementation to meet the needs of youth and families
Interagency collaboration	Golden et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2020; Saleh et al. 2019	Establishing formal agreements or contracts requires time up-front; include service benchmarks for accountability; the use of executive or steering committees as a management tool; challenges such as staff turnover and organizational capacity; lessons related to employing state, regional, and local communities of practice
Program management	Golden et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019; Saleh et al. 2019	Data sharing to monitor progress and engagement; need for clearly defined roles of partners and staff; use of steering committees for overall program leadership; use of a technical assistance center to support management and line staff
Staff development and training	ASPIRE 2020; Crane et al. 2021; Gold et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Luecking et al. 2019; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019	Need for cultural sensitivity training and continuous field-based coaching; monitoring staff caseloads to ensure adequate capacity to deliver services
Data collection and management	Golden et al. 2019; Guentherman et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019	Extensive time required to negotiate data sharing agreements; lack of common identifiers across data sets; relying on the use of existing programs complicates user access management
Participant engagement	Anderson et al. 2021; Crane et al. 2019; Hall et al. 2020; Ipsen et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2020; Schlegelmilch et al. 2020	Need for staff to be persistent and flexible in communications; meetings in locations and at times that are convenient for youth; importance of establishing trust with youth and families; use of financial incentives to encourage participation; need to allocate resources to increase engagement
Fidelity to the service model	Crane et al. 2021; Luecking et al. 2019; Saleh et al. 2019	Need for staff to receive continuous training; establishing targets or benchmarks in outreach to and contacts with youth and families; conducting fidelity interviews to understand service delivery; setting project service targets; tracking service delivery by geography
Case management	ASPIRE 2020; Chambless et al. 2019; Golden et al. 2021; Hall et al. 2020; Johnson et al. 2020; McCormick et al. 2021	Importance of face-to-face meetings to establish trust with youth and families; successful case management includes persistence and flexibility; case managers require training on youth transition services and crisis management
Service delivery	Anderson et al. 2021; ASPIRE 2020; Crane et al. 2021; Chambless et al. 2019; Golden et al. 2019; Hall et al. 2020; Johnson et al. 2020; Jones et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019; McCormick et al. 2021; Schlegelmilch et al. 2019; Schlegelmilch et al. 2020; Selekman et al. 2018; Tucker et al. 2019a; Tucker et al. 2019b; Williams et al. 2019	Implementation approaches, facilitators, and challenges for topics such as employment services, benefits counseling, IDAs, motivational interviewing, self-determination, and family services; adaptability and flexibility in service delivery; delivering services across large geographic or rural areas; soliciting staff feedback to address service challenges; continuous quality improvement processes

Because maintaining fidelity to the intervention in large-scale programs is challenging, PROMISE programs undertook several practices to promote scale and fidelity. PROMISE programs continually adapted to improve coordination and service delivery within programs. ASPIRE, for example, instituted several processes across its six states in this regard, including standardizing staff training and procedures manuals, hiring two full-time training specialists to provide ongoing training and TA, monthly training seminars for program staff, biannual all-staff meetings for training and relationship building, pre- and post-implementation fidelity assessments, and ongoing monitoring of service delivery in each state (Anderson et al. 2018; ASPIRE 2020). All PROMISE programs convened steering or advisory committees that met regularly to discuss study progress or operational issues. In addition, PROMISE programs made early investments in staff training and provided continual training and coaching opportunities to ensure consistent service delivery (Crane et al. 2021). For example, MD PROMISE enlisted the support of a TA provider with expertise in transition interventions to assist in regular field training of staff and intervention implementation (Luecking et al. 2019), whereas NYS PROMISE conducted biannual on-site fidelity visit interviews that consisted of open-ended interview questions asking staff to describe their methods for coordinating services and referrals for youth and families (Saleh et al. 2019).

Yet, at the same time that PROMISE programs desired fidelity to their models, PROMISE programs required flexibility to alter programs to meet the varied needs of youth and families, whose poverty and disability could often interfere with and present barriers to service use (Johnson et al. 2020; Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019). Programs thus intended for their staff to tailor their services to meet families' needs and encourage service use, such as switching from individual to group service delivery or vice versa—for example, ASPIRE's approach to offering self-determination training (Chambliss et al. 2019).

IV. PROMISE Provided New Information About Services for Families, Service Engagement, and Younger Participants

The PROMISE demonstration provided new information in three areas: interest in and effectiveness of family services, youth and family engagement in services, and the ability to connect with younger participants. We discuss each of these topics in the following section.

A. Family service use, a novel component of PROMISE, was associated with youth service use, but family service use had minimal impacts on parents' outcomes

PROMISE programs offered services not just to youth, but also to their families. These services covered training and information to support youth and education, training, and employment services for family members. Some programs intrinsically embedded family services in the PROMISE service model and integrated them with case management alongside youth services (Honeycutt et al. 2018). ASPIRE, for example, noted the importance of holistic family services as an aspect to promote employment, which it defined as “actions that served youth in the context of pressing family issues” (McCormick et al. 2019). Other programs provided families with information and services through organizations that specialized in family services, such as family resource centers in CaPROMISE. WI PROMISE used a blended approach where core program staff offered families employment services, and contracted family advocates assisted them with other needs.

PROMISE succeeded in having more families (that is, family members other than the youth) use services: about 60 percent of treatment group families used any services as of the 18-month assessment, compared with 45 percent of control group families (Leveré et al. 2020). Families were more likely to use services related to their children (50 percent) than services for themselves (39 percent). Typically, though, families who used services for themselves also accessed family services for their children.

Despite their impacts on family service use, the programs' five-year impacts for parents were minimal. ASPIRE reduced parental earnings and income; AR PROMISE reduced the proportion of parents covered by health insurance; and WI PROMISE had a positive impact on parents by increasing the proportion covered by health insurance (Patnaik et al. 2022a). The lack of five-year impacts reflects differences between the treatment and control groups in their use of family services at 18 months. Although significant, this difference between the two groups at 18 months was not substantial; almost half of control group parents reported using family services, and parents used services for their youth more than they did for themselves. Many families may not have needed services for themselves, at least the services that PROMISE programs offered. Most parents, for example, were employed in the period between enrolling in PROMISE and the 18-month assessment (Mamun et al. 2019), and, in CaPROMISE, families in which a parent had full-time employment used less parent training than families in which a parent was unemployed and not looking for work (Tucker et al. 2019b).

One exception to the lack of parent impacts is in the subgroup of families in which at least one parent received SSA benefits at enrollment. Compared with other parents, these parents had higher employment, earnings, and income impacts five years after enrollment in Arkansas PROMISE and higher employment impacts in MD PROMISE. It may be that offering services to families benefited some, but not all, types of parents.

One critical finding about family services is that youth used more services when their families used services—a pattern that was consistent for both treatment and control group youth. For example, when families used any services, more than three-quarters of their children used employment services; the corresponding rate in families who did not use services was about half (Levere et al. 2020). Although the association between family service use and youth’s 18-month outcomes was modest, it suggests three possible relationships between youth and family services: family involvement in services could bolster youth’s involvement in services; youth involvement in services could increase family use of services; and certain types of families might be more likely to use multiple types of services.

Related analyses of PROMISE youth’s pathways to education and employment five years after enrollment revealed that when parents used training and information services, it contributed to youth’s outcomes in different ways. Use of those services during the first 18 months of enrollment was associated with small negative effects on youth’s educational attainment, employment, and earnings, and positive effects on SSA payments five years after enrollment (Patnaik, Harrati, and Musse 2022). These findings might result from self-selection (that is, if parents of youth with more significant disabilities sought this service more than other parents did) or the knowledge that resulted from using this service (that is, if youth and families used the knowledge to make specific choices to limit their efforts toward obtaining education and employment).

B. PROMISE programs addressed difficulties in engaging youth and families throughout program implementation

Engaging youth and families in services was a challenge for all of the PROMISE programs, and that lack of engagement affected both implementation and the evaluation. This pattern is not uncommon; a large proportion of participants in employment demonstrations may not use services or drop out (see, for example, Heckman et al. 2000), and the same is true for youth with disabilities who enroll in employment or transition programs (for example, Haber et al. 2008). This lack of engagement can dilute a program’s impacts.

As part of their work, PROMISE programs and the national evaluation documented the difficulties that youth and families had in using services. ASPIRE, for example, observed youth and family service use was below their expected benchmarks (Ipsen et al. 2019). Case managers in ASPIRE reported five types of crises commonly experienced by families that interfered with service use: behavioral, family conflicts, financial, legal/corrections, and transportation (Hall et al. 2020). The focus by youth and families on immediate crises limited their ability to engage in program services offered by PROMISE and also placed burdens on program staff to help families address those crises (Selekman et al. 2018). Other limitations to service use involved family expectations for youth’s employment (McCormick et al. 2020), the fact that using PROMISE services costs families both time and money in terms of time away from work or other obligations as well as travel (Schlegelmilch et al. 2020), and distrust of the service system (Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019). However, another consideration with programs identifying a family as “disengaged” is that the family members may not think of themselves in that same way (Schlegelmilch et al. 2020).

PROMISE programs responded to the lack of engagement by developing approaches to connect with youth and families—responses that may have contributed to the 18-month service impacts. The programs could invest in these approaches because they had the funding and staff to do so, and they had a fixed cohort to whom they offered services. MD PROMISE, for example, hired seven specialized case managers who focused on re-engaging youth and advancing the youth’s goals (Crane et al. 2019; Kauff et

al. 2018). WI PROMISE counselors reported that maintaining communication with youth required extensive effort and that using tablets, smartphones, and especially texting was helpful (Anderson et al. 2020). Other responses included using incentive programs (Ipsen et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2018; Honeycutt et al. 2018; McCutcheon et al. 2018); involving the family as part of the engagement strategy (Johnson et al. 2020); emphasizing person-centeredness (Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020); training on how to respond to crises (Hall et al. 2020); offering material support, such as cash assistance (Hall et al. 2020; Honeycutt et al. 2018); using state databases to track down families who had moved (Honeycutt et al. 2018); and hiring staff members who reflected the characteristics of participants (Matulewicz et al. 2018).

The service engagement challenges experienced by the PROMISE programs and their responses to them highlight the lack of established best practices about how to offer the right set of services in a way that interests youth and families and motivates them to take up services. Because the programs had a fixed cohort of enrollees, they may have used more intensive engagement approaches than they would have if they had been able to enroll more youth. Transition programs similar to PROMISE would likely not undertake such intensive efforts to re-engage youth and families who sign up for services and might instead replace disengaged participants with newly enrolling youth and families or offer services to those who are easiest to serve (Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019).

C. Program experiences were no different for younger and older participants

Policymakers may be interested in the differences between the experiences of younger and older groups of participants because their needs and interests around employment, in particular, may differ. If so, programs might focus on either older youth (who may be more interested in working) or younger youth (to establish a stronger employment foundation). However, the national evaluation did not find consistent patterns across programs in service use and employment outcomes between youth by age at either the 18-month or five-year evaluations. For example, at 18 months after enrollment, employment outcomes were no different for younger (those ages 14 and 15 at enrollment) and older (those ages 16 at enrollment) participants in five of the six programs. The exception was MD PROMISE, where employment impacts were larger for younger participants. Similarly, the outcomes at 18 months for using any transition services were different for younger and older participants in two of the six programs: Arkansas PROMISE and CaPROMISE had greater impacts on this outcome for younger participants than for older ones. The general lack of consistent differences by enrollment age continued at the five-year observation. For example, impacts on total youth earnings in the five calendar years after enrollment for older participants were lower in ASPIRE, but no different in other programs. In addition, no program had differences by youth's age in the outcome of youth employment in a paid job in the past year. However, in developing profiles of PROMISE enrollees based on their outcomes, Patnaik, Harrati, and Musse (2022) found that youth ages 14 and 15 at enrollment were less likely to have a profile that included high education and high employment than youth who were age 16, possibly because they were younger. These patterns suggest that the PROMISE programs connected with younger participants as well as they did with older ones, which could reflect their person-centered approaches to youth and families—though outcomes may differ somewhat by age at enrollment.

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V. PROMISE Provided New Information About Youth and Family Outcomes and Program Costs

In this section, we document information on outcomes that resulted from the PROMISE demonstration. The programs generated a range of information on youth and families 18 months after enrollment and five years after enrollment. They also raise considerations related to their cost relative to their benefits.

A. PROMISE had positive 18-month impacts across multiple domains, reflecting consistency with its model

PROMISE succeeded in generating impacts during the intervention service period. All the PROMISE programs had 18-month impacts on youth and family members' service use and the employment and economic well-being outcomes for youth as intended by their models, though the size of these impacts varied by program. For example, CaPROMISE increased youth use of case management services by 31 percentage points, employment services by 30 percentage points, VR applications by 21 percentage points, being employed in a paid job by 19 percentage points, and \$102 in annual income (Mamun et al. 2019). PROMISE less frequently affected other domains at 18 months, such as education, self-determination, expectations, and health insurance. The domains with impacts reflect the PROMISE models' emphasis on services and employment—that is, what the programs intended to offer youth and families. The positive impacts on services, employment, and economic well-being at 18 months are likely the result of the active involvement of youth and families in services. For example, all programs except ASPIRE subsidized wages for some youth (Mamun et al. 2019). At 18 months after enrollment, most participants would still be using services, and so outcomes at this stage reflect program outputs.

B. Two programs had youth employment impacts five years after enrollment, but most other impacts were limited

By five years after enrollment, the PROMISE programs had limited impacts on outcomes across domains. Only two programs (NYS PROMISE and WI PROMISE) increased the percentage of youth employed in a paid job in the year before the survey (Patnaik et al. 2022a). The 1-in-3 chance of PROMISE programs having positive employment impacts is the same chance of impacts that youth employment programs have in general (Kluve et al. 2016). One possible reason for the success of NYS PROMISE and WI PROMISE is their use of specialized staff. NYS PROMISE brought in experienced staff from an established youth employment program to assist in their employment efforts in New York City, whereas WI PROMISE used an integrated approach using existing VR counselors to provide employment services. Though other programs had positive employment impacts in earlier years, those impacts were not sustained by the fifth year because control group youth caught up to the employment levels of the treatment group. Three programs (those in California, Maryland, and Wisconsin) increased youth's total income, which could reflect a combination of increased earnings and increased SSA payments. Programs had limited impacts in other domains, including parent outcomes.

The lack of consistent impacts as of five years after youth's enrollment could be due to a number of factors.

- The counterfactual service environment, as discussed in Section III.A, was relatively strong in that most youth used services to promote their transition to young adulthood. This finding might be due in part to the fact that youth who enrolled in the program were more interested in employment and less

interested in education than their counterparts in the general population of youth with disabilities or those receiving SSI (Farid et al. 2022). PROMISE therefore faced a high bar for generating impacts, because the program existed in an environment where youth accessed many programs that are likely to be effective. Heckman et al. (2000) documented issues with program evaluations when control group members use services that are similar—or similar enough—to those offered to treatment group members. If a program offers services that can substitute for those that control group members can easily use, then the impact of the program will be diminished. Transition programs might seek to differentiate themselves from the counterfactual service environment by finding ways to develop and implement services that differ in critical ways from existing ones to fill significant gaps and unmet needs.

- PROMISE’s impacts follow a similar trajectory as other youth employment programs. During youth’s participation in a program, they experience positive impacts on employment and earnings, then those impacts dissipate over time (Gelber et al. 2016; Schochet et al. 2008; Valentine et al. 2017). That PROMISE impacts would be similar is not surprising, especially because youth respond to programs differently, and any single program cannot address the needs of all youth (Bloom and Miller 2018).
- As detailed in Section IV.B, the PROMISE programs documented sizeable numbers of youth and families who did not use the offered services. Though programs worked to address the lack of engagement, these efforts may not have increased service take-up enough to generate impacts.
- The PROMISE model, though successful in connecting many youth to employment, case management, and other services, may not have equipped youth and families with resources to navigate the service and employment environment once they left the program.
- Participants were still relatively young (ages 19 to 21) at the five-year follow-up (Patnaik et al. 2022a).
- Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic was underway during the fifth year after enrollment for most of the sample, which is when the national evaluation conducted its participant surveys. The pandemic suppressed program impacts on labor market outcomes (but not education and training outcomes) more profoundly for treatment group youth than for control group youth, possibly because the treatment group youth had better outcomes before the pandemic and so had more room for erosion (Hill et al. 2022).

Even though PROMISE did not affect health or earnings in the first five years, it is possible that they could have eventual impacts. A quasi-experimental analysis of the Civilian Conservation Corps program found that those who had longer program participation had higher lifetime earnings and lived longer than those with shorter program participation, though two to eight years after starting the program, the outcomes between the two groups were no different (Aizer et al. 2020). An examination of effects 17 years after participation in a positive youth development program for youth living in poverty found that youth who participated in the program were more likely to have completed college compared to youth who did not participate (Sheehan et al. 2022). Longer tracking of PROMISE participants on lifetime earnings and mortality could show whether the programs have future impacts later in life.

PROMISE may have had other impacts not measured directly by its evaluations. The coordinated efforts of state partners to deliver transition services to youth may have influenced staff capacity along with the relationships and collaborations in offering services to youth (Emenheiser et al. 2021). In New York State, for example, the PROMISE steering committee was asked to serve on the New York State Employment First Commission for youth transition and thus may have indirectly informed its policy

plans (McCutcheon et al. 2018), and WI PROMISE resulted in specific changes to its service environment. The Wisconsin state VR agency specifically sought to sustain some elements of PROMISE, including staff training changes, changing the structure of its benefits counseling, and offering soft skills training (Hartman et al. 2019). Another consideration is that the youth and families who participated in PROMISE may have approached the program as something more than an employment program and thus obtained other benefits, such as general well-being and connections with other families, alongside the outputs and outcomes intended by the demonstration.

C. Large investments in youth may be difficult to offset with immediate benefits

A larger question is whether a program such as PROMISE, which offered more or better transition services for youth with disabilities than usually exist, can generate benefits large enough to offset its costs. The national evaluation documented the difficulty for the benefits (in terms of individual earnings and government savings) to exceed the costs in the foreseeable future, given the five-year impacts (Patnaik et al. 2022a). The per-participant cost across programs ranged from about \$19,000 to \$41,000; despite positive benefits to youth and families, the net cost did not exceed the overall net benefits for any program, reflecting both the sizeable program costs and the small earnings impacts within five years after enrollment. Two program-specific evaluations proposed different economic arguments for continued PROMISE services. Anderson et al. (2019) made the case for continued case management services offered by WI PROMISE using early impacts and the potential for federal and state government savings, whereas Enayati and Shaw (2019) document how a small proportion of participants moving off of SSI and Medicaid and remaining so over their lifetimes could offset PROMISE costs. As more evidence comes to light about the impacts of PROMISE beyond the five-year mark and the effectiveness of specific transition services, policymakers may consider ways to incorporate those practices into existing or new programs, weighing the costs with both tangible benefits (such as increased employment and decreased dependence on public benefits) and intangible ones (such as improved well-being and social connections).

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VI. PROMISE Findings Point to Future Directions to Fill Knowledge Gaps

The PROMISE findings point to areas where we lack information about practices related to the transition of youth with disabilities from school to young adulthood. Below, we identify four of the most pressing gaps: two related to service delivery options, one related to the literature about transition, and one specific to youth receiving SSI.

A. The appropriate length of service access

The positive impacts observed at 18 months after enrollment and the lack of consistent impacts at five years raise questions about whether youth receiving SSI need longer, continuous services. The PROMISE programs, because they were demonstrations, were by definition time limited. Though ED provided each program with five years of funding (along with no-cost extensions), youth and families could use program services for only a portion of those years; the average time between enrollment and exit ranged from 2.9 years to 3.4 years across programs (Mamun et al. 2019). Thus, access to PROMISE services ended for youth when they were around the ages of 17 to 19 and in the throes of the transition process. Although some were still enrolled in high school, others were just beginning their post-high-school employment and education activities.

Because of the many barriers that youth receiving SSI and their families face, the cessation of services at the conclusion of the demonstration may have created an artificial end point that limited the effectiveness of PROMISE programs. If the programs had been permanent, youth and families may have continued to use services until they no longer had a need for PROMISE, which happens in other programs such as VR. Youth receiving SSI may encounter many environmental or societal obstacles in their transitions to young adulthood, such as health issues, household poverty, crisis management, unstable housing, transportation challenges, low employment expectations, service availability, and limited employer options (Hall et al. 2020; McCormick et al. 2021; Schlegelmilch et al. 2020). Despite the potential for PROMISE programs to help participants address these and other barriers, the barriers could have remained or re-emerged for youth and families once PROMISE programs ended, particularly if participants did not establish connections with other providers or did not gain the knowledge and skills to navigate these obstacles independently of the program.

The proper length of time for service availability remains an open question. Longer or more consistent supports—such as case management that continues throughout young adulthood—could promote stronger employment and education outcomes. This longer approach to services has been suggested by Karhan and Golden (2021) and Stapleton et al. (2021) as an option to promote better outcomes for youth receiving SSI. The counterargument to extending services in this manner is that any program would have natural entry and exit points as youth and families first engage in services, then either complete them or lose interest. At some point, too, the services no longer become tied to “transition;” they are simply services that anyone meeting program requirements could obtain. Such a situation raises considerations about the need of these services specifically for transitions from school to adulthood or whether anyone, no matter their age, could benefit. Finally, given the intensive engagement strategies that PROMISE programs pursued to keep youth and families involved (for example, Crane et al. 2019), few youth and families may have continued with PROMISE beyond the demonstration’s natural end point.

Further, if youth would benefit from longer, continuous services as part of their transition to young adulthood, the setting of such services deserves careful attention. No single existing agency has all the components of the PROMISE programs, which may be why each program organized its staffing

differently, either by placing it within existing programs (though local education or VR agencies) or building new programs that relied on resources from existing programs. Proposals for long-term supports to improve outcomes for youth receiving SSI suggest a range of potential partner agencies and emphasize braided funding, such as across SSA, Medicaid, and the workforce system (Karhan and Golden 2021) or public-private partnerships (Stapleton et al. 2021). Secondary education institutions would not be likely candidates, given their lack of connections with youth beyond high school graduation. If employment is the primary focus of these transition services, then the workforce system—and VR agencies in particular—could be the right place for offering these services. However, the workforce system might not be able to offer other aspects of the PROMISE model, such as case management and service navigation, or easily continue services with people after they obtain employment. Centers for Independent Living, funded through Administration for Community Living, could be an option, given their focus on community inclusion and supports, but might need to pivot to improve their emphasis on employment. Regardless of the agency chosen, such an expansion would likely require both legislation to allow agencies to develop this service role and funding to support it.

B. Identifying youth and families who could benefit most from transition services and supports

PROMISE enrolled a broad range of youth with the only requirements that they received SSI, were ages 14 to 16, and lived in a location served by one of the PROMISE programs. Despite the enticements of the additional services and employment opportunities, PROMISE programs had difficulty enrolling youth and families and engaging them after enrollment (Crane et al. 2019; Gold et al. 2019). The evidence from PROMISE provides some clues about considerations for better outreach with youth and families who could most benefit from a program such as PROMISE or to alter services to improve outcomes for those who may need additional supports.

In general, the national evaluation observed few persistent differences in service and other outcome impacts by sex, race and ethnicity, or disability (Mamun et al. 2019; Patnaik et al. 2022a). These patterns suggest that service take-up and outcomes were similar and roughly equitable across the age, race and ethnicity, and sex characteristics measured by the evaluation.

More nuanced assessments suggest variation in characteristics, service use, and outcomes for different groups of youth—information providers could leverage to inform their service practices. However, more evidence may be needed to identify the best ways policymakers could apply this information.

- **Youth characteristics associated with different transition pathways.** A descriptive analysis of youth's five-year outcomes characterized three prominent education and employment pathways: high levels of education and employment, employed and not in postsecondary education, and low levels of education and employment (Patnaik, Harrati, and Musse 2022). Youth in the high education and employment pathway were older and more likely to use services; youth in the employed and not in postsecondary education pathway were more likely to have a parent receiving disability benefits; and youth in the low education and employment pathway were more likely to have an intellectual or developmental disability. Youth in the latter group also had higher SSA payments, lower scores for their self-determination, and less likelihood of living independently.
- **Youth with high medical needs.** PROMISE programs also had differential impacts for youth who had high medical needs in the year before enrollment (Dale et al. 2023). Youth with high medical needs are defined as those having Medicaid expenditures greater than the 75th percentile of youth in

their respective program during the year before PROMISE enrollment. For CaPROMISE and MD PROMISE, five-year employment impacts were positive among youth who did not have high medical needs, whereas for Arkansas PROMISE and WI PROMISE, employment impacts were greater among youth who had high medical needs the year before they enrolled. Moreover, in analyses that pooled information across programs, parent employment impacts at five years were positive for parents of youth who did not have high medical needs the year before enrollment, but not for parents of youth who did have high medical needs.

- **Families with parents receiving SSA payments.** As noted, youth and families with at least one parent who received SSA payments appeared to benefit from their participation more than families in which no parents were receiving SSA payments at enrollment. For example, the impacts on annual employment rates in the fifth year after enrollment were larger for CaPROMISE youth in families in which at least one parent received SSA payments at enrollment; employment impacts were larger for parents in the Arkansas PROMISE and MD PROMISE in those same families (Patnaik et al. 2022a). These findings suggest that families in which more than one generation is receiving SSA payments may have benefitted more from PROMISE services than other families, had more opportunities to take up the offers of services, or had specific needs that could be addressed by the program.

Findings from the program-specific studies point to additional relationships between youth and family characteristics and outcomes, though it should not be inferred that any of these relationships are causal.

- WI PROMISE documented lower employment rates for youth who were younger, Hispanic, had an intellectual or developmental disability, or used transition services through an individual education plan (Hartman et al. 2021).
- Among treatment group youth, ASPIRE observed lower employment rates for youth who were female, had an autism disorder, or had a nervous system disorder (McCormick et al. 2021).
- CaPROMISE explored differences in services and outcomes between youth who graduated with a high school diploma and those who graduated with a certificate of completion (Guillermo et al. 2021). The former used more employment preparation and career-related training and education services and had higher expectations for employment and college; the two groups did not differ, however, in their work experiences.
- CaPROMISE families with parents or guardians who worked full time used fewer parent training services than families with parents or guardians who did not work and were not looking for work (Tucker et al. 2019b). In addition, use of parent training services was lower among families whose youth expected to work and among youth and families who expected the youth to go to college.
- Though CaPROMISE youth did not differ in the number of employment-related interventions by age, sex, and disability type, they had some differences across specific employment interventions by parent or guardian work or education levels and youth and parent or guardian expectations for work or college (Tucker et al. 2019a).

Transition programs might consider whether and how to market or alter their service offerings to youth and families with different characteristics, partly in an effort to improve the outcomes of those more likely to have poor outcomes. Such characteristics could be full-time employment of parents or guardians, variation in expectations for youth employment and college, and household receipt of SSA benefits. Characteristics of youth could encompass specific disabilities, their high school education track, and their medical needs. Youth transition programs are often broadly inclusive; anyone who is interested and meets the program eligibility criteria can use services. Nonetheless, they could potentially increase their

effectiveness by considering an array of youth and family characteristics and how those characteristics can affect service use.

To help programs that are similar to PROMISE, future analyses of PROMISE data could share insights gained from PROMISE programs that improved outreach and engagement and hence became more efficient, inclusive, or effective for certain youth. A machine learning approach, for example, could further our understanding of the differences in the characteristics of youth and families who were more or less likely to use PROMISE services and who had better or worse outcomes. Davis and Heller (2017) used such an approach to identify the baseline characteristics of youth who benefited from an employment intervention, which had no overall positive effects. Youth who were younger, female, more connected to school, Hispanic, and less likely to have been arrested tended to have a higher likelihood of employment. The authors concluded that overall employment impacts might overshadow impacts for specific subgroups, and those subgroups can be difficult to identify. Alternatively, tracking the characteristics, service use, and outcomes for youth whom programs identified as engaged, disengaged, or re-engaged in PROMISE services (for example, Crane et al. 2019) could provide useful information on the ultimate benefits and utility of re-engagement strategies. Whether narrowly targeted programs are cost effective or have a sufficient population base to offer services is an unanswered question.

C. Limitations of the evidence on what works for youth with disabilities to successfully transition to adulthood

Youth with disabilities, their families, practitioners, and policymakers desire evidence to assist with service and program choices that support better transition outcomes of youth with disabilities. Yet what is presented as “evidence-based” research can be limited in important ways.

- The literature often reflects correlational analyses, which cannot control for selection bias—that is, someone who chooses a service may be more likely to benefit or be more motivated than someone who does not choose a service (Geyer et al. 2020).
- Practitioners frequently want to believe that the services youth use result in positive outcomes, because they have seen youth achieve positive outcomes as a result of their programs. This issue can affect the literature that involves surveys of practitioners to identify best practices or understand what works; practitioners cannot see the counterfactual, or the successes that youth may have without the service in question.
- The outcomes studied tend to be more immediate, either measured while youth use services or just after completing them. After the observation period, a program’s impacts on outcomes can diminish over time because the comparison group catches up to the treatment group. Without longer assessments, we cannot know if more immediate impacts are sustained, nor can we presume what the eventual trajectories will be for participants and the counterfactual (Alterman and Treskone 2022).
- In some cases, the transition literature considers positive relationships without adequately accounting for youth and family characteristics (such as gender, race and ethnicity, SSI receipt, disability type, disability severity, or motivation). More attention needs to be paid to the demographic characteristics of youth and what works for whom (Mazzotti et al. 2020).
- Interventions may be bundled as part of a range of practices, and so researchers cannot properly distinguish the effects of any single practice (Gregory and Moffit 2021).

Some of these limitations exist to some extent in the PROMISE literature, as well. For example, PROMISE tested a package of services that is difficult to untangle, limiting the interpretations of impacts. In a practical sense, offering this comprehensive package addressed the multiple problems that youth receiving SSI and their families faced, and it reflected real-world service use where youth and families access multiple services and providers. Program-specific evaluations relied on correlational evidence to show the effectiveness of a service (such as Hartman et al. 2019 and Ipsen et al. 2019), or collected input on best practices from program administrators, which did not take the counterfactual experiences into consideration (Johnson et al. 2020).

Because of these limitations, we should be cautious in our interpretation of existing evidence that relies on correlational analyses and use of that evidence to justify policies, programs, and services. The literature on benefits counseling is a good example. A consistent finding is that people who participate in benefits counseling are more likely to have worked (for example, Schlegelmilch et al. 2019). Because these studies rely on correlations, and even though they may control for certain personal characteristics, they cannot control for the fact that people who are more likely to work (or already working) may be more inclined to seek out benefits counseling. Although the findings may be interpreted as “benefits counseling leads to employment,” it may be equally true to state, “employment leads to benefits counseling.”

Stronger evidence could avoid the above limitations, largely through the use of rigorous comparison groups and long-term follow up of participants. This recommendation is not unique to this report; others who have conducted literature reviews about what works for youth with disabilities have made similar calls (Geyer et al. 2021; Madaus et al. 2020; Mazzotti et al. 2020). Although randomized controlled trials are expensive and complicated to execute, they offer the best approach for assessing impacts and understanding what works and for whom and avoid the reliance on correlational analyses. Additionally, tests of more narrowly-defined interventions or interventions that use factorial designs to assign services may provide policymakers with more useful information than tests of broad or bundled interventions.

D. Youth and families’ knowledge about SSA policies and work incentives

All PROMISE programs offered benefits counseling services to youth and families as a project requirement. This service is important for youth receiving SSI and their families given that any earnings can affect their SSI and other benefits, and they could potentially take advantage of the various work incentives that SSA offers for those receiving SSI (SSA 2020). The PROMISE TA center identified an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to improving SSI benefits knowledge as one of its PROMISE service lessons (Johnson et al. 2020). Typically, use of benefits counseling services by youth is low, despite existing federal investments, such as Work Incentives Planning and Assistance programs and the brochure that SSA sends to youth receiving SSI at age 17 to inform them about work supports and the age-18 redetermination process (SSA 2021). Between 5 and 8 percent of control group youth and 12 to 17 percent of their families across the PROMISE programs reported using benefits counseling services within 18 months after enrollment (Mamun et al. 2019). These findings confirm qualitative information gathered as part of the PROMISE implementation evaluation that few youth used benefits counseling through usual providers (for example, Selekmán et al. 2018).

PROMISE programs took various approaches in the benefits counseling services offered to treatment group members, all with limited effects. WI PROMISE, for example, offered benefits counseling through existing Work Incentives Planning and Assistance projects along with additional subcontractors (Selekmán et al. 2018). Alternatively, CaPROMISE trained their case management staff on benefits

counseling, most of whom became certified benefits counselors (Matulewicz et al. 2018). That project intended for its staff to offer such services directly to youth and families through individual and group sessions. No matter the approach, programs had positive effects on the percentage of youth and families reporting use of benefits counseling 18 months after enrollment, with impacts of 6 to 27 percentage points for youth and 11 to 27 percentage points for families (Mamun et al. 2019). Despite these impacts on benefits counseling, PROMISE programs had modest or no effects on youth's awareness of SSA policies and work incentives five years after enrollment, nor did the programs affect youth's SSA payments (Patnaik et al. 2022a). Though PROMISE typically increased the percentage of youth who were aware of SSA work supports, the proportion who were aware of any single support was no higher than 15 percent. In addition, with limited exceptions, PROMISE programs had no impact on the treatment group's knowledge of SSA policies, such as being able to work for pay or having to report earnings to SSA. These limited impacts on SSA-specific knowledge are not restricted to PROMISE or to youth receiving SSI. For example, SSA's Promoting Opportunity Demonstration, which emphasized benefits counseling services, had no impact on the understanding of work rules for adults receiving SSDI (Croake et al. 2022), despite half of the treatment group using individualized work incentives counseling. A limitation of prior evaluations involving SSA's and other agencies' demonstrations, including PROMISE, is that the implementation and evaluation did not accurately measure the quality of benefits counseling, and so we cannot be sure that the lack of impacts is due to the service itself or to an inferior version of the service (Sundar 2021).

The lack of positive impacts for PROMISE on specific SSA policy knowledge suggests the disability and youth transition fields have more to learn about effective benefits counseling or other ways to improve youth and families' awareness. PROMISE program staff described various barriers and challenges with offering benefits counseling to youth and families, including families' lack of interest, reluctance to engage in group services, or unwillingness to disclose financial information (for example, Anderson et al. 2018; Kauff et al. 2018). SSA and Work Incentives Planning and Assistance staff, along with VR agency staff who are working with youth receiving SSI, might look for new approaches to benefits counseling that address these issues.

One potential approach successfully used by two PROMISE programs to improve knowledge of work supports is the use of cash incentives. More than one-half of treatment group members in ASPIRE and more than one-third of treatment group members in Arkansas PROMISE were aware of Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts five years after enrollment (Patnaik et al. 2022a). People with disabilities can use ABLE accounts to save money for specific purposes; such savings have a tax advantage and do not count against asset criteria for SSI and other benefits (ABLE National Resource Center n.d.). Both programs used ABLE accounts as incentives. For example, ASPIRE provided up to \$2,500 in funds for ABLE accounts as an incentive to youth who completed financial literacy training (Ipsen et al. 2019). Such large incentives could be difficult for a program to offer, but it might be worthwhile to test smaller ones.

VII. Conclusions

This report documented the ways that the PROMISE demonstration confirmed existing evidence, identified new findings on services and outcomes, and exposed gaps that remain about what works to promote outcomes for youth with disabilities. The evidence, based on practitioner observations and comprehensive national and local assessments, could bolster how programs offer and improve services for youth with disabilities and their families. These lessons could also promote how we assess the effectiveness of future programs for youth with disabilities. Both aspects are important because this population, particularly those receiving SSI, continue to lag their peers without disabilities on employment, education, public benefit dependence, and other outcomes as they enter young adulthood (Farid et al. 2022). Future approaches to improve the outcomes of youth with disabilities could benefit from the knowledge generated through the PROMISE programs.

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Appendix A
PROMISE Evaluation Literature to Date

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Table A.1. PROMISE evaluation literature to date

Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
National evaluation					
The Education and Work Experiences of PROMISE Youth	Farid, Katz, Hill, and Patnaik 2022	Report	Comparison of the education and work experiences of PROMISE youth with those of other youth (including those with and without disabilities)	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Education_and_Work.pdf	All programs
How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect the Education and Employment of Young People with Disabilities? Findings from the Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) Evaluation	Hill, Musse, and Patnaik 2022	Report	Description of how COVID-19 affected youth with disabilities, including those participating in PROMISE	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_COVID_19_Pandemic.pdf	All programs
Insights About the Transition System for SSI Youth from the National Evaluation of Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE)	Livermore et al. 2020	Journal article	Lessons from PROMISE for the transition system	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191056	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE) Evaluation: Interim Services and Impact Report	Mamun et al. 2019	Report	18-month impact evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Interim_Impact_Report.pdf	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Arkansas PROMISE Process Analysis Report	Honeycutt et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/AR_PROMISE_Process_Analysis_Report.pdf	Arkansas
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): ASPIRE Process Analysis Report	Anderson et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/ASPIRE_process_analysis_report.pdf	ASPIRE

Appendix A PROMISE Evaluation Literature to Date

Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): California PROMISE Process Analysis Report	Matulewicz et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/CaPROMISE%20process%20analysis%20report.pdf	California
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Early Impacts from a Multi-Site Random Assignment Evaluation	Patnaik et al. 2021	Journal article	Summary of 18-month impacts	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0193841X211055588	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Family Service Use and Its Relationship with Youth Outcomes	Levere et al. 2019	Report	The connection between family services and youth outcomes	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Family_Services_Report.pdf	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Maryland PROMISE Process Analysis Report	Kauff et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/MD_PROMISE_Process_Analysis_Report.pdf	Maryland
Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE): Medicaid Expenditure Patterns and Impacts with a Focus on Youth with High Medical Needs	Dale et al. 2023	Report	Assessment of Medicaid spending patterns and the relationship between youth's health needs and program impacts	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Medicaid.pdf	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): New York State PROMISE Process Analysis Report	McCutcheon et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/NYS_PROMISE_Process_Analysis_Report.pdf	New York State
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): PROMISE Programs' Use of Effective Transition Practices in Serving Youth with Disabilities	Honeycutt et al. 2018	Report	The services offered by the PROMISE programs in the context of best practices	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Effective_Practices.pdf	All programs
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): The Role of PROMISE in the Landscape of Federal Programs Targeting Youth with Disabilities	Honeycutt and Livermore 2018	Report	The role of PROMISE in the landscape of federal programs involving youth with disabilities	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE%20and%20federal%20programs.pdf	All programs

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Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Wisconsin PROMISE Process Analysis Report	Selekman et al. 2018	Report	Process evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/WI%20PROMISE%20Process%20Analysis%20Report.pdf	Wisconsin
Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): Youth and Family Outcomes Five Years After Enrollment	Patnaik et al. 2022	Report	Five-year impact evaluation results	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Five_Year_Report.pdf	All programs
Youths' Pathways to Employment and Education	Patnaik, Harrati, and Musse 2022	Report	Assessment of service, work, and education pathways that youth take to achieve five-year outcomes	https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/PROMISE_Youth_Pathways.pdf	All programs
Program-specific evaluations					
Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment: a PROMISE initiative	ASPIRE 2020	Report	Evaluation findings from the ASPIRE program on implementation, services, and lessons learned	https://www.promisetacenter.org/aspire	ASPIRE
Bounding the Return on Investment and Projecting the Costs of Expanding PROMISE Services and Activities: Initial Insights from PROMISE for Policymakers	Enayati and Shaw 2019	Journal article	Return on investment and projected costs across PROMISE programs	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191044	All programs
Building a Management Information System with Inter-Agency Data Sharing to Improve Data-Based Decision Making Across Systems: Experiences from Wisconsin PROMISE	Guentherman et al. 2020	Journal article	The processes and challenges in building an interorganizational data sharing system	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0034355220962182	Wisconsin
CaPromise: Training Interventions for Parents and Guardians of Young Recipients of Supplemental Security Income	Tucker et al. 2019a	Journal article	Differences in parent service use by youth and family characteristics	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191040	California

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Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Case Management Strategies to Promote Employment for Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities	McCormick et al. 2021	Journal article	Effective case management strategies	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143421991826	ASPIRE
Career and Work-Based Learning Interventions for Young Recipients of Supplemental Security Income	Tucker et al. 2019b	Journal article	Differences in youth use of career and work-based services by youth and family characteristics	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191034	California
Centering Communities, Constellations and Networks of Practice to Improve Youth Post-School Outcomes through PROMISE	Golden et al. 2019	Journal article	The challenges and limitations of pursuing a center of practice model to support service delivery	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191031	New York State
Demographic and Transition Service Predictors of Employment Outcomes for Youth Receiving Supplemental Security Income	Hartman et al. 2021	Journal article	The relationship between youth employment outcomes and demographic and service variables	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143420984797	Wisconsin
Early Findings from the Wisconsin PROMISE Project: Implications for Policy and Practice	Hartman et al. 2019	Journal article	An early assessment of program services and outcomes	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191036	Wisconsin
Employment Supports in Early Work Experiences for Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities who Receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	Williams et al. 2019	Journal article	Characteristics associated with successful completion of youth summer work experiences	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191035	Arkansas
Engaging and Retaining Youth SSI Recipients in a Research Demonstration Program: Maryland PROMISE	Crane et al. 2019	Journal article	Youth engagement strategies	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191033	Maryland

Appendix A PROMISE Evaluation Literature to Date

Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Engaging SSI Youth and Families with ASPIRE Services	Ipsen et al. 2019	Journal article	Predicting youth employment outcomes from service use and a description of program engagement strategies	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191039	ASPIRE
Exploring the PROMISE of Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities Receiving SSI	Ipsen et al. 2019	Journal article	Preliminary results 24 months after enrollment	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr180991	ASPIRE
How Family Crises May Limit Engagement of Youth with Disabilities in Services to Support Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment	Hall et al. 2020	Journal article	How youth and family crises impede service engagement	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074092030699X	ASPIRE
Improving Post-School Living, Learning and Earning Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities who Receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Findings and Recommendations from Six National PROMISE Demonstration Sites	Anderson and Golden 2019	Journal article	An introduction to the special issue on PROMISE programs in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191030	All programs
Improving the Adult Outcomes for SSI Youth Recipients: Introduction to a Special Series on PROMISE	Crane et al. 2021	Journal article	An introduction to the special issue on PROMISE programs in Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143420980726	All programs
Interagency Collaboration in Transition to Adulthood: A Mixed Methods Approach to Identifying Promising Practices and Processes in the NYS PROMISE Project	Saleh et al. 2019	Journal article	Promoting interagency collaboration	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191037	New York State
Intervention Fidelity in a Large Scale Model Demonstration Project: Lessons From Maryland PROMISE	Luecking et al. 2019	Journal article	An approach to improve service fidelity	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191041	Maryland

Appendix A PROMISE Evaluation Literature to Date

Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Lessons Learned from CaPROMISE Youth and Their Families	McFarlane and Guillermo 2019	Report	Reflections on the culture and systems changes to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities	https://www.dor.ca.gov/Content/DorInclude/documents/BMHR/Attachment_H_Accessible_A_-_CaPROMISE_Lessons_and_Actions.pdf	California
Moving Ahead with PROMISE: Lessons Learned from Six Model Demonstration Projects Through the Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income Project	Johnson et al. 2020	Report	Lessons learned from the PROMISE program implementation	https://ici.umn.edu/products/jfkXhnJUQLGW7JyYLyUbmj	All programs
Overview of PROMISE	Emenheiser et al. 2021	Journal article	ED's motivation for the PROMISE demonstration and program features	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143420980458	All programs
Pursuing Graduation: Differences in Work Experience Supports for Young SSI Recipients Pursuing Diplomas or Certificates	Guillermo et al. 2021	Journal article	Differences in work experiences by youths' educational attainment	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143421989409	California
The Relationship Among Demographic Factors, Transition Services, and Individual Development Account (IDA) Saving Participation Among Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities	Jones et al. 2020	Journal article	Youth use of IDA accounts	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0034355220962215	Wisconsin
SSI Youth and Family Case Management: A Taxonomy of Critical Factors, Competencies, and Translation to Practice	Golden et al. 2021	Journal article	A framework for effective case management strategies, skills, and attitudes to support youth receiving SSI	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143420986758	New York State
Staff Capacity Building and Accountability in Transition Services	Crane et al. 2021	Journal article	The effects of staff training on youth outcomes	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165143420986465	Maryland

Appendix A PROMISE Evaluation Literature to Date

Title	Authors	Type	Topic	Link	PROMISE program(s)
Stages of Change Scale to Measure Work Readiness of Transition-Age Youth With Disabilities: A Promising Approach	Schlegelmilch et al. 2021	Journal article	The effect of motivational interviewing on youth attitudes around employment	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0034355220970619	Wisconsin
Strategies for Recruiting Participants Into Randomized Controlled Trials: A Cross-Program Profile of the PROMISE Demonstration Program	Gold et al. 2019	Journal article	Recruitment strategies used by PROMISE programs	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191042	All programs
Teaching Self-Determination to Youth with Disabilities: The ASPIRE Model	Chambless et al. 2019	Journal article	Implementation challenges and program adaptations for self-determination training	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191038	ASPIRE
Technology and Communication Considerations for Engaging Youth Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Benefits: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Perspectives	Anderson et al. 2021	Journal article	The role of technology to engage youth in program services	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0034355220980808	Wisconsin
The Impact of Work Incentives Benefits Counseling on Employment Outcomes of Transition-Age Youth Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Benefits	Schlegelmilch et al. 2019	Journal article	The effect of work incentive benefits counseling on employment outcomes	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191032	Wisconsin
Understanding PROMISE Participant Transition Experiences Using Qualitative Data: Reflections on Accessing Services and Employment Outcomes	Schlegelmilch et al. 2020	Journal article	Case studies on the perspectives of youth and families' program engagement	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0034355220962190	Wisconsin
What Matters: Lessons Learned from the Implementation of PROMISE Model Demonstration Projects	Nye-Lengerman et al. 2019	Journal article	Lessons learned from PROMISE program implementation	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191045	All programs
Wisconsin PROMISE Cost-Benefit Analysis and Sustainability Framework	Anderson et al. 2019	Journal article	Estimated costs and potential savings	https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr191043	Wisconsin

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; ED = U.S. Department of Education; PROMISE = Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income; SSI = Supplemental Security Income.

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