

LITERACY COALITION

OF CENTRAL TEXAS
BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES



Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources

Evaluation of Literacy Coalition of Central Texas Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps (TFLA) Initiative

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction	1
Background	1
Overview	1
COVID-19 Pandemic: Reimagining workforce development programing	2
Report Organization.....	3
Evaluation Overview	3
Data Sources	4
Program Outcomes	5
Program Impacts.....	5
Analysis of Outcomes and Impacts.....	7
Participants Receiving one-on-one job coaching.....	7
Participants Receiving Career Readiness Training and Occupational Skills Training.....	8
Outcomes Discussion	10
Supplemental Analysis of LCCT Outcomes and Impacts.....	10
Analysis of LCCT Program Exiters: FY 2016–FY 2020	10
Workforce Training Program Participant Outcomes and Impacts: FY 2017–FY 2019	18
Participants Completing Work Readiness Training.....	18
Participants completing vocational training and received industry recognized certificate	23
Discussion of Participant Outcomes and Impacts.....	29
Analysis of Interviews: AmeriCorps Members and Site Supervisors	32
Analysis of AmeriCorps Member Interviews	33
Analysis of Site Supervisor Interviews	37
Discussion of Site Supervisors and AmeriCorps Members Interviews	39
References	41
Appendix A: Description of Outcomes Table Elements	42
Appendix B: Description of Impact Table Elements.....	43
Appendix C: Quasi-Experimental Impacts Analysis.....	44
Appendix D: Interview Guides	46

List of Tables

Table 1. UI Wage Data Quarters for TFLA: September 1, 2020—July 31, 2021.....	5
Table 2. Employment Gains: Participants Receiving One-on-One Job Coaching (LCCT Data)	7
Table 3. Outcomes: Participants Receiving One-on-One Job Coaching.....	8
Table 4. Employment Gains: Occupational Skills Training by Career Readiness Training (LCCT Data)	9
Table 5. Outcomes: Participants Receiving Occupational Skills Training.....	9
Table 6. Literacy Coalition Participant Outcomes: FY 2016–FY 2020 Exitters.....	13
Table 7. Literacy Coalition Quarterly Impacts: FY 2016–FY 2020 (n=420).....	15
Table 8. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers in FY 2017–FY 2019.....	19
Table 9. Quarterly Impacts: Participants Workforce Readiness Training Completers: FY 2017–FY 2019 (n=189).....	21
Table 10. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification FY 2018–FY 2019	25
Table 11. Quarterly Impacts: Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification FY 2018–FY 2019 (n=51)	27
Table 12. Four Quarters Post Service Outcomes	30
Table 13. Four Quarters Post Service Impacts.....	30

List of Figures

Figure 1. Average Quarterly Employment for Literacy Coalition Exiters: FY 2016–FY 2020.....	14
Figure 2. Average Quarterly Earnings for Literacy Coalition Exiters: FY 2016–FY 2020	14
Figure 3. Employment Rates Over Time, Literacy Coalition Participants vs. Comparison Group: FY 2016-FY 2020	16
Figure 4. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Literacy Coalition Participants vs. Comparison Group: FY 2016–FY 2020.....	17
Figure 5. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers Average Quarterly Employment: FY 2017–FY 2019	20
Figure 6. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers Average Quarterly Earnings: FY 2017–FY 2019	20
Figure 7. Employment Rates Over Time, Workforce Readiness Training Completer vs.....	22
Figure 8. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Workforce Readiness Training Completer vs.....	23
Figure 9. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification Average Quarterly Employment: FY 2018–FY 2019.....	26
Figure 10. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification Average Quarterly Earnings: FY 2018–FY 2019.....	26
Figure 11. Employment Rates Over Time, Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification vs. Comparison Group: FY 2018–FY 2019	28
Figure 12. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification vs. Comparison Group: FY 2018–FY 2019	29

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Literacy Coalition of Central Texas Mission

The Literacy Coalition of Central Texas breaks the cycle of intergenerational poverty through comprehensive literacy services.

Introduction

BACKGROUND

The National Center for Education Statistics reports Texas has a literacy rate of 81 percent, with 19 percent of adults lacking basic prose literacy skills: Literacy skills that support “. . . understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written text to participate in the society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential," (NCES, 2020).

The Literacy Coalition of Central Texas (LCCT) coordinates a network of community-based adult education service providers (partner sites) to implement a workforce development program that integrates literacy, High School Equivalence exam preparation, and English as a second language instruction with one-on-one job coaching, workforce preparation skill building, and occupational training.

OVERVIEW

LCCT received funding from the OneStar Foundation to implement the Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps (TFLA) program. Each partner site works with two LCCT AmeriCorps members who are trained to implement the TFLA program in the context of each site's existing literacy services.¹ Program participants meet with AmeriCorps members to receive one-on-one job coaching services. Students interested in advanced career development instruction receive job readiness training and have an opportunity to enter occupational skills training. Participants work with an AmeriCorps job coach to complete an Individual Learning Plan to further outline their educational and career goals. The TFLA program has the potential to address inequities in employment and earnings advancement by

¹ The Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps Initiative is a part of the AmeriCorps State & National network of national service programs that engage adults of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet the nation's critical needs in education, public safety, health, and environment.

coordinating education, training, and support services for low-wage workers to advance into in-demand, middle-skill jobs to increase their wages and economic security.

Literacy Coalition of Central Texas (LCCT) contracted with the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources (RMC), a research institute of the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, to conduct an evaluation including implementation, outcomes and impacts analysis components. The purpose of the study is to present information that can assist LCCT to better understand the components of effective efforts to advance the careers of low-income workers.

The following section presents a discussion of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on service delivery and employment.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: REIMAGINING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMING

As workforce development training organizations closed their doors at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (mid-March 2020), staff went to work reimagining the LCCT program: Creating and transitioning to virtual education, training, case management, career coaching, and support services. LCCT chose which trainings to offer online, which trainings to suspend, and some training programs were re-launched using a hybrid model that combined virtual with limited face-to-face training.

Further, LCCT shifted to respond to participant technology and emergency needs. While the digital divide became a barrier to services, LCCT coordinated efforts to distributed laptops, Chrome books, Wi-Fi hot spots, and provided participants with technical support: created tutorials and cheat sheet instructions on how to access various virtual platforms. Program participants had work hours cut, lost jobs and internships, and were furloughed creating a wave of financial emergency needs. LCCT worked with funders to reallocate funds to purchase technology equipment and support emergency assistance.

During the pandemic, the application process for potential program participants shifted to a virtual process. Potential participants experienced challenges obtaining required documents for employment as government administrative offices closed or provided services online.

While childcare services evaporated and schools closed, many program participants and staff adjusted to working from home with the added responsibility of caring for their own children. Area organizations reported that the isolation from peers, classmates, family, and friends contributed to mental health issues becoming a greater concern for participants, prompting staff to create regularly

scheduled check in times with some program participants. Traditional avenues and venues for participant recruitment evaporated and LCCT struggled to retain and reengage participants.

The pandemic continued to influence service provision throughout the period of time examined in this evaluation.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

The first section of this report presents the evaluation overview including the research questions, research methods, the data used for this analysis, and challenges encountered in using the UI wage data. Then, the outcomes and impacts analysis findings are presented, in addition outcomes and impacts for a broader set of LCCT participants are included in this report, followed by a discussion and recommendations for future program evaluation. The next section presents the analysis of site supervisors and AmeriCorps members interviews, followed by a summary discussion including recommendations for program implementation.

Evaluation Overview

This evaluation was designed to examine labor market outcomes and impacts for TFLA participants enrolled in one-on-one career counseling and those completing career readiness instruction from September 1, 2020–July 31, 2021. The evaluation examines four key research questions:

- (1) What are the employment and income outcomes for participants receiving the following services Career Development services?
 - (a) One-on-one job coaching
 - (b) Career readiness training
- (2) What are the employment and income impacts for participants receiving the following services?
 - (a) One-on-one job coaching
 - (b) Career readiness training
- (3) What is the impact of receiving Career Readiness services on six-month employment retention?
 - (a) One-on-one job coaching
 - (b) Career readiness training

- (4) What is the outcome of receiving Career Readiness services on entering and completing occupational skills training?

DATA SOURCES

This evaluation of the TFLA program draws from multiple data sources including participant records maintained by LCCT, UI wage and benefits claim files, the Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) and WorkInTexas (WIT) records, conversations with program administrators and staff, interviews with AmeriCorps members and their site supervisors, program documents, the LCCT website and social media, and published reports (see Appendix A: Interview Guides).

Two caveats should be noted about UI wage data used for this evaluation. First, UI wage records have known coverage gaps. Workers in industries with high levels of self-employment or independent contracting, such as construction, yard and home maintenance, and casual work engagements, are less likely to be in a UI-covered position.² Researchers therefore acknowledge that the outcomes reported here for LCCT participants likely undercount actual labor market participant outcomes. Second, UI wage records are subject to review and correction by workers and employers as part of the claim's determination process for UI benefits. Therefore, numbers reported here are based on the most recently available records.³

One additional issue regarding the use of UI wage data is the lag time in RMC's receipt of wage data. For this report, participant outcomes and impacts are aggregated into service quarters within each given fiscal year. Table 1 illustrates the time period examined this evaluation: September 1, 2020–July 31, 2021. The *begin* quarters identified in Table 1 represent each available quarter within the evaluation timeframe when participants began receiving one-on-one job coaching and/or career readiness training. The *begin* quarter is followed by the service quarters where outcomes can be found for participants with SSNs in the data. The findings in this report include wage data from four quarters prior to beginning services and subsequent service quarters up to eight quarters after entering career development services (through June 30, 2021, the last quarter for which wage data are available).

² The Austin-based Workers Defense Project has thoroughly documented the extensive practice of hourly worker misclassification as contract employees in the construction industry in Austin and elsewhere in Texas. See *Building Austin, Building Injustice* (Workers Defense Project), 2009.

³ Any discrepancies are expected to be quite small.

Table 1. UI Wage Data Quarters for TFLA: September 1, 2020—July 31, 2021

Fiscal Year	2020-2021		2021-2022				2022-2023			
Quarters	10/1/19-6/31/20*	7/1/20-9/30/20	10/1/20-12/31/20	1/1/21-3/31/21	4/1/21-6/31/21***	7/1/21-9/30/21	10/1/22-12/31/22	1/1/22-3/31/22	4/1/22-6/31/22	7/1/22-9/30/22
Participants Begin TFLA Services		<i>Begin**</i>		2 nd Qrt		4 th Qrt				8 th Qrt
			<i>Begin</i>		2 nd Qrt		4 th Qrt			
				<i>Begin</i>		2 nd Qrt		4 th Qrt		
					<i>Begin</i>		2 nd Qrt		4 th Qrt	

*10/1/19-6/31/20 represents the four quarters prior to the first *begin* quarter of this evaluation.

**This first *begin* quarter includes participants receiving career development services during this quarter who had career development service *begin* dates prior to 7/1/2020. These specific participants will have outcomes reported for four quarters following their true *begin* date in the wage data.

***The last quarter wage data are available for this analysis is separated from quarters with no available data with a thick black line.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Outcomes are reported for unduplicated participants with SSNs found in the workforce data across the time period examined for each fiscal year cohort.⁴ Outcomes reported include quarterly employment, quarterly earnings, qualification for UI benefits, and filing of UI benefit claims. For each participant the time period examined begins four quarters prior to receiving TFLA program services, extending to include all post *begin* service quarters in which program participants appear in the data.

For example, the participants beginning the services of interest in the 7/1/2020–9/30/2020 quarter will be represented in more post service quarters than participants receiving these services during the 7/1/2021–9/30/2021 quarter. Each outcomes table includes all participant data with SSNs found in the data and for the time period examined. More information on the outcomes measured is presented in Appendix A: Description of Outcomes Table Elements.

PROGRAM IMPACTS

The Ray Marshall Center impact analysis design uses a quasi-experimental evaluation methodology to estimate the “value-added” from receiving workforce development one-on-one job coaching and additional career development training by comparing labor market outcomes for participants with those of a matched comparison group. Impacts are analyzed by means of a quasi-experimental design that uses propensity score matching to select individuals from a pool of potential

⁴ Quarters representing less than 10 participants found in the data, are not included in the outcomes tables.

comparison group members who are comparable along multiple dimensions to those who received services supported by LLCT. Comparison group members were drawn from TWIST records and include Travis County residents who registered for employment with the state’s WIT program or who received job search services at local Workforce Solutions Career Centers or online. Thus, the impact analysis measures the incremental difference between those who received limited employment services with those who received the additional services through LCCT.

Quasi-experimental approaches tend to work well when participants for whom comparison groups are created have sufficient prior employment and earnings histories, and when data are available on a sufficient number of variables with which to perform the match.

The analysis reports on impacts in aggregate form and was designed to include the estimation of unadjusted and adjusted net effects. The impact tables present the unadjusted net effect, simply the difference between mean outcomes for the participants and control groups. Impact graphs illustrate the unadjusted net effect of the comparison of average earnings over time, regardless of employment status (i.e., unconditional earnings), and of participants to the comparison group members at least four quarters prior to beginning career development services, at the quarter career development services began, and the following service quarters for participants with SSNs who appear in the workforce data.⁵ Net effects (labeled as “impact measure” in the tables) account for unmeasured socioeconomic and other differences not already controlled for in the matching process. More information on the impacts measured, and the matching process, is provided in Appendix B: Description of Impact Table Elements; and Appendix C: Quasi-Experimental Impacts Analysis.

Because of the way data are tracked in the WIT system, members of the comparison group were located in Travis County at the time the data were obtained by RMC; however, individuals may or may not have been located in Travis County during all of the time periods studied.

⁵ Unconditional earnings represent the average earnings for all program exiters and their matched comparison group, including individuals identified in the data earning zero dollars.

Analysis of Outcomes and Impacts

PARTICIPANTS RECEIVING ONE-ON-ONE JOB COACHING

The following section of this report presents an analysis of the data LCCT provided to RMC along with the analysis of program participants with SSNs found in the workforce data.

Participant Profile

LCCT reported 480 TFLA program participants received one-on-one job coaching services, over half identified as female (55%) with 0.8 percent identifying as transgender. Nearly half, 47.5 percent identified as Hispanic, 27.3 percent identified as Black, and 12.3 percent as White. Education level was missing/unknown for 85 percent of participants with 12.9 percent reporting earning a high school diploma or GED.

Participant Outcomes

The data provided by LCCT identified 480 participants received one-on-one job coaching. Among this group, 123 (26%) were reported to have received an employment gain during the period examined, including new employment (120), one promotion, and two reported wage raises (Table 2).

Table 2. Employment Gains: Participants Receiving One-on-One Job Coaching (LCCT Data)

Received one-on-one job coaching	Employment Gain	New Employment	Promotion	Raise
Yes n=480	123 (26%)	120	1	2
No n=399	1	1	0	0

Table 3 presents outcomes for a subgroup of 77 participants receiving one-on-one job coaching with SSNs found in the workforce data. Of the 77 participants with SSNs found in the data, 20 were identified in the fourth quarter following the service *begin* quarter. These 20 participants experienced an average quarterly increase in employment of 11 percentage points from the four quarters before beginning services and the fourth quarter following the beginning of services. This same subgroup of 20 participants experienced an average quarterly wage increase of \$579 in the time examined. The data further identified a 5.3 percentage point increase in participants qualifying for UI benefits and none of the 20 participants filed a claim for UI benefits during the time period examined.

Table 3. Outcomes: Participants Receiving One-on-One Job Coaching

Outcome Measure	Four Qtrs Before Service	First Qtr of Service	2nd Qtr After Service Start	4th Qtr After Service Start	8th Qtr After Service Start	All Qtrs After Service Start
Number of Participants:	77	77	51	20	.	
Quarterly Employment	64.0%	61.0%	54.9%	75.0%	.	62.2%
Average Quarterly Earnings	\$6,321	\$4,895	\$5,215	\$6,900	.	\$6,197
Qualified for UI Benefits	59.7%	67.5%	56.9%	65.0%	.	60.8%
Filed UI Claim	9.1%	5.2%	5.9%	0.0%	.	4.1%

PARTICIPANTS RECEIVING CAREER READINESS TRAINING AND OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

Participant Profile

The LCCT identified 113 participants receiving both career readiness training and occupational skills training. Occupational skills training courses were structured to include the career readiness training curriculum. These 113 participants were also identified in the group of program participants receiving one-on-one career counseling. Approximately two-thirds of this group identified as male (64.6%). Just over half 51.3 percent identified as Hispanic, 11.5 percent identified as Black, and 20.4 percent as White. Education level was missing/unknown for 38.1 percent of participants with 54.9 percent reporting a high school diploma or GED.

Participant Outcomes

Table 4 reports on employment gains for occupational skills training completers and non-completers by receipt of career readiness instruction. Non-completers represent participants who stepped out of training due to pandemic hardships with the intention to return, those who dropped out of services, and 32 participants who were still in class receiving instruction on July 31, 2021, the end date for this analysis.

Of the participants reporting an employment gain (42 participants) all receive career readiness training, however, of the 71 participants who did not report an employment gain, all participants received career readiness training as well.

Table 4. Employment Gains: Occupational Skills Training by Career Readiness Training (LCCT Data)

Occupational Skills Training	Completers		Non-Completers	
Entered Occupation Skills Training n=113	42 (36.8%)		71 (63.2%)	
Received career readiness instruction	38*		71	
Employment gain	Yes	No	Yes	No
	19 (45%)	19 (45%)	22 (30.5%)	49 (69.5%)

*Missing = 4

Table 5 presents outcomes for a subgroup of 75 participants receiving career readiness training and occupational skills training with SSNs found in the workforce data (this group of 75 participants also received one-on-one job coaching and are included in Tables 2 and 3). The data identified 20 participants with SSNs in the data four quarters after beginning services. These 20 participants experienced an average quarterly increase in employment of 11 percentage point from the four quarters before entering services and the fourth quarter following service entry. This same subgroup of 20 participants experienced an average quarterly wage increase of \$769 in the time examined. The data further identified a five-percentage point increase in participants qualifying for UI benefits and none of the 20 participants filed a claim for UI benefits during the time period examined.

Table 5. Outcomes: Participants Receiving Occupational Skills Training

Outcome Measure	Four Qtrs Before Service	First Qtr of Service	2nd Qtr After Service Start	4th Qtr After Service Start	8th Qtr After Service Start	All Qtrs After Service Start
Number of Participants:	75	75	50	20	.	
Quarterly Employment	64.0%	60.0%	54.0%	75.0%	.	61.6%
Average Quarterly Earnings	\$6,131	\$4,738	\$4,852	\$6,900	.	\$6,001
Qualified for UI Benefits	60.0%	68.0%	56.0%	65.0%	.	60.3%
Filed UI Claim	9.3%	5.3%	6.0%	0.0%	.	4.1%

This report is unable to present a meaningful analysis of the differences in the outcomes for participants receiving one-on-one job coaching compared with those receiving career readiness training/occupational training in that *all participants receiving career readiness/occupational training also received one-on-one coaching*. Removing the participants receiving career readiness/occupational

training from the group of those receiving one-on-one coaching would result in too few participants to conduct a meaningful outcomes analysis.

OUTCOMES DISCUSSION

The limited number of participant SSNs found in the wage data available for this analysis may reflect a number of factors not uncommon to literacy programs nationwide. The mission of many literacy programs is to serve the community of individuals lacking English proficiency, families with low incomes, and those with low educational attainment. This population includes refugees and immigrants who often have employment that will not appear in the UI wage data. Routinely requesting SSNs from participants during program in-take is viewed by many literacy program providers to create an atmosphere inconsistent with the goal of serving these vulnerable populations. Programs hesitate to ask for SSN unless the funding stream the participant is accessing requires an SSN.

The limited SSNs found in the available workforce data combined with the limitations of the evaluation timeframe, restricts the capacity of this analysis to identify meaningful impacts of the TFLA services. In an effort to provide additional insight into the employment and earnings outcomes and impacts of LCCT services, RMC included in this report the findings from an analysis of LCCT services RMC conducted for the Travis County Health and Human Services Department. Travis County awarded LCCT \$241,196 annually during the FY 2016–FY 2020 time period to provide services to Travis County residence. The following report section includes the evaluation of workforce outcomes and impacts for Travis County LCCT program participants exiting the LCCT program from FY 2016–FY 2020. In addition, outcomes and impacts for two subgroups of LCCT program participants found in the workforce data are also provided: workforce readiness training completers in FY 2017–FY 2019, and participants completing occupational skills training who received an industry recognized certification during FY 2018–FY 2019.

Supplemental Analysis of LCCT Outcomes and Impacts

ANALYSIS OF LCCT PROGRAM EXITERS: FY 2016–FY 2020

The Travis County Workforce Development Community Impact Reports for FY 2016–FY 2020, identify that in each fiscal year the LCCT served over 1,000 participants. Many LCCT partners who provide services to non-English speaking populations maintain that requesting SSNs on intake forms will create a barrier to services and some LCCT sites serve specific refugee and immigrant populations. In FY 2018, LCCT staff began working in earnest with area partners to encourage the requesting of SSNs from

participants at the time of program entry, particularly for those individuals receiving work readiness skill-building services.

Participant Profile

This analysis reports on the available data of 425 Literacy Coalition participants who exited the program in FY 2016–FY 2020 with SSNs identified in the data.⁶ The average age of Literacy Coalition participant exiters is 36 and nearly 13 percent are 50 or older. Over half of the program exiters identified as Hispanic (52.9%), with 40.5 percent identifying as White and 22.1 percent identifying as Black (race/ethnicity was missing/unknown for 22.1% and 24.7% respectively). Most exiters were female (57.9%). One-third of exiters report less than a 12th grade education (education level is missing/unknown for 50.4% of the participants). Exiters report residing primarily in the following areas: East Austin (32.5%), South Austin (27.3%). and North Austin (20%).⁷

Participant Outcomes

Table 6 presents the available data for Literacy Coalition participants who exited services (completed or dropped out) in FY 2016–FY 2020. Outcomes are reported for the 425 participants whose social security numbers were identified within the wage data. In the four quarters prior to entering the program, overall quarterly employment for the Literacy Coalition exiters was 53.5 percent. Overall, average quarterly employment grew to 63.1 percent during the exit quarter, followed by minor fluctuations in employment for many of the remaining quarters for those for whom data are available.

The average overall earnings during the pre service quarters was \$5,206 increasing to \$6,176 four quarters post service, which amounts to a \$970 average wage increase. For all cohorts, most post service quarterly earnings represented in the data present a continued pattern of employment earnings growth over time.

The FY 2018 and FY 2019 cohorts earnings gain of over \$2,500 and \$1,839 (respectively) by the eighth quarter post services may reflect the earnings of LCCT participants who completed vocational training and received an industry recognized certificate (52 participants completed the training and received an industry recognized certificate). The FY 2020 cohort wage data did not reflect similar wage

⁶ Literacy programs are not required by Travis County to request social security numbers from clients.

⁷ Information on exiter judicial involvement, veteran status and receipt of public benefits were missing/unknown from the reported data.

gains. This may be a result of the training completion quarter being further into the fiscal year, and/or possibly the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hiring practices in the Travis County area (outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Prior to entering LCCT, 42.7 percent of participants overall had sufficient employment and earnings histories to meet the monetary eligibility requirements for UI benefits. A year after leaving training, 53.9 percent met the requirements for eligibility. Very few participants (2.1% overall) filed a claim for UI benefits in the period examined. The data identifies an increase in UI benefit claims filed during the quarter the pandemic training and employment restrictions began.

Following this section, employment and earnings outcomes for Literacy Coalition Workforce Training Program participants , provides additional outcomes analysis of Literacy Coalition's 176 program exiters identified in the data as having completed work readiness training, as well as of 51 participants identified as having completed vocational training and received an industry recognized certificate.

Table 6. Literacy Coalition Participant Outcomes: FY 2016–FY 2020 Exiters

Cohort Outcome Measure	Four Qtrs Before Service	Last Qtr of Service	2nd Qtr Post service	4th Qtr Post service	8th Qtr Post service	12th Qtr Post service	16th Qtr Post service	All Post service Qtrs
Number of Participants:								
FY 2016	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	
FY 2017	107	107	107	107	107	107	.	
FY 2018	99	99	99	99	99	16	.	
FY 2019	121	121	121	121	54	.	.	
FY 2020	21	21	21	21	.	.	.	
Overall	425	425	425	425	337	200	77	
Quarterly Employment:								
FY 2016	50.7%	55.8%	59.7%	53.3%	57.1%	59.7%	*49.4%	55.8%
FY 2017	52.8%	65.4%	62.6%	62.6%	67.3%	*57.9%	.	62.6%
FY 2018	57.3%	63.6%	64.7%	63.6%	*58.6%	62.5%	.	62.3%
FY 2019	54.3%	66.1%	61.2%	*65.3%	55.6%	.	.	61.8%
FY 2020	44.1%	57.1%	*52.4%	57.1%	.	.	.	54.8%
Overall	53.5%	63.1%	61.7%	61.7%	60.5%	59.0%	49.4%	60.4%
Average Qrtly Earnings:								
FY 2016	\$3,837	\$3,654	\$3,992	\$4,494	\$4,709	\$4,841	\$5,889	\$4,751
FY 2017	\$4,899	\$5,645	\$5,259	\$4,896	\$5,968	\$5,249	.	\$5,356
FY 2018	\$5,860	\$5,824	\$7,022	\$7,501	\$8,364	\$7,806	.	\$7,616
FY 2019	\$5,728	\$5,801	\$7,383	\$7,196	\$7,367	.	.	\$7,300
FY 2020	\$5,123	\$5,128	\$5,158	\$5,406	.	.	.	\$5,287
Overall	\$5,206	\$5,391	\$6,063	\$6,176	\$6,583	\$5,307	\$5,889	\$6,108
Qualified for UI Benefits:								
FY 2016	37.0%	39.0%	41.6%	49.4%	49.4%	48.1%	48.1%	47.3%
FY 2017	46.0%	43.0%	49.5%	57.0%	55.1%	54.2%	.	54.0%
FY 2018	43.4%	50.5%	54.6%	55.6%	59.6%	56.3%	.	56.6%
FY 2019	44.0%	48.8%	48.8%	52.9%	*53.7%	.	.	51.4%
FY 2020	35.7%	23.8%	42.9%	52.4%	.	.	.	47.6%
Overall	42.7%	44.7%	48.7%	53.9%	54.9%	52.0%	48.1%	52.1%
Filed UI Claim:								
FY 2016	2.0%	2.6%	0.0%	2.6%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%
FY 2017	1.6%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%	*4.7%	.	1.6%
FY 2018	1.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	*3.0%	6.3%	.	1.6%
FY 2019	1.0%	0.0%	1.7%	*4.1%	7.4%	.	.	3.7%
FY 2020	0.0%	0.0%	*9.5%	0.0%	.	.	.	4.8%
Overall	1.4%	0.5%	1.4%	1.7%	2.7%	3.5%	1.3%	2.1%

Source: Literacy Coalition participant records and Texas Workforce Commission UI wage and claim records.

Note: The highlighted cells in the *Number of Participants* columns represent the number of participants who exited the program during the 1st or 2nd quarters of their cohort fiscal year, allowing these exiters to be represented in the identified quarter. The shaded cells represent the percentage of these participants found in the UI wage data. For example, in FY 2018, 16 participants had exit dates that allowed their post service quarters to extend to 12 qtrs and 62.5% of the 16 were identified as employed in the data. Post service quarters with low cohort counts were not included in the outcomes graphs.

Note: A dot represents too few participants (<10), no data to report, or insufficient time passing to report for that timeframe.

Participants were counted as employed if they were found in Texas UI wage records. Those who were not found may be unemployed, employed outside of Texas, or employed in Texas in a position that is not UI-covered and reported to TWC.

*Jan. 1, 2020–March 31, 2020 Quarter: Includes March 19, 2020, the beginning of pandemic stay-at-home order.

Figure 1. Average Quarterly Employment for Literacy Coalition Exiters: FY 2016–FY 2020

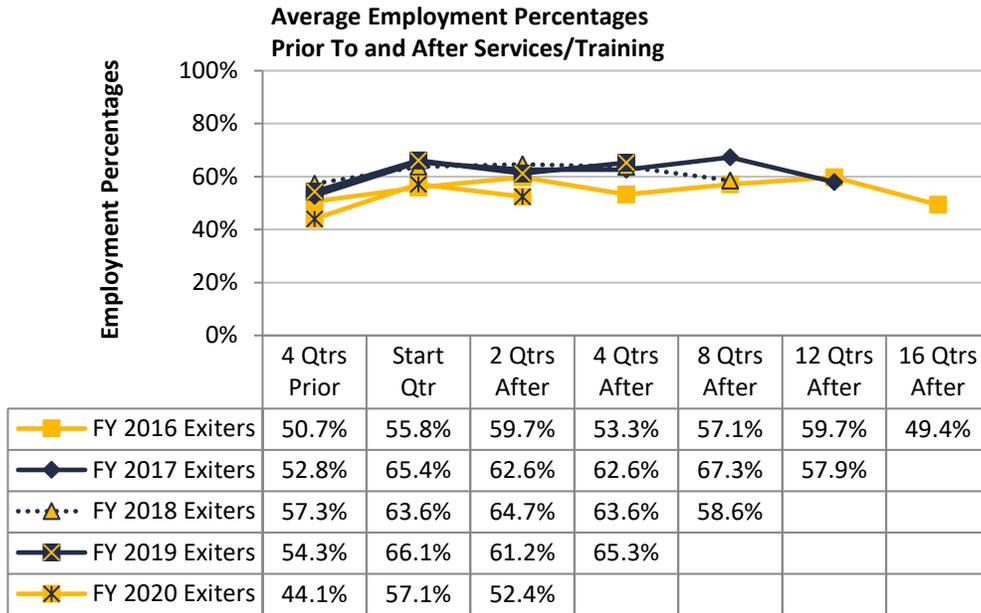
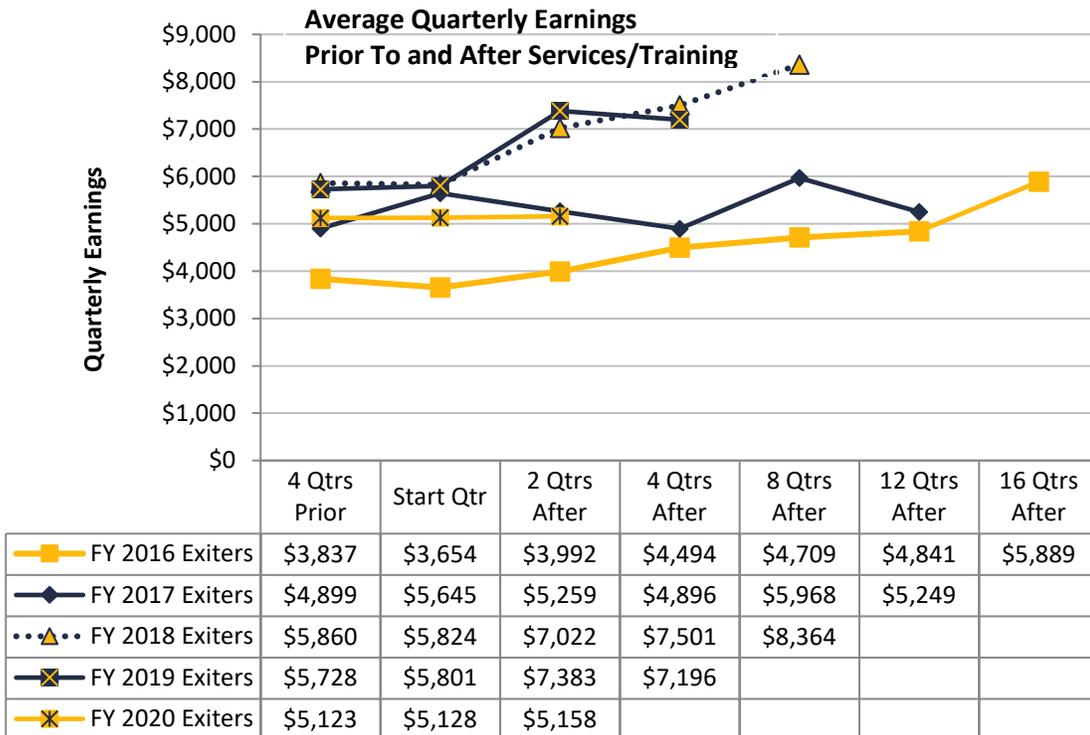


Figure 2. Average Quarterly Earnings for Literacy Coalition Exiters: FY 2016–FY 2020



Program Impacts

Table 7 presents findings from the impacts analysis comparing the outcomes of 420 Literacy Coalition FY 2016–FY 2020 exiters to the outcomes of a matched comparison group. The table presents impacts only for exiters for whom adequate matching could be performed. Participation in Literacy Coalition programs was positively associated, and statistically significant, with one of the outcomes measured: an increase in quarterly employment (3.1%). Participation was also associated with statistically significant lower quarterly earnings of \$1,465.

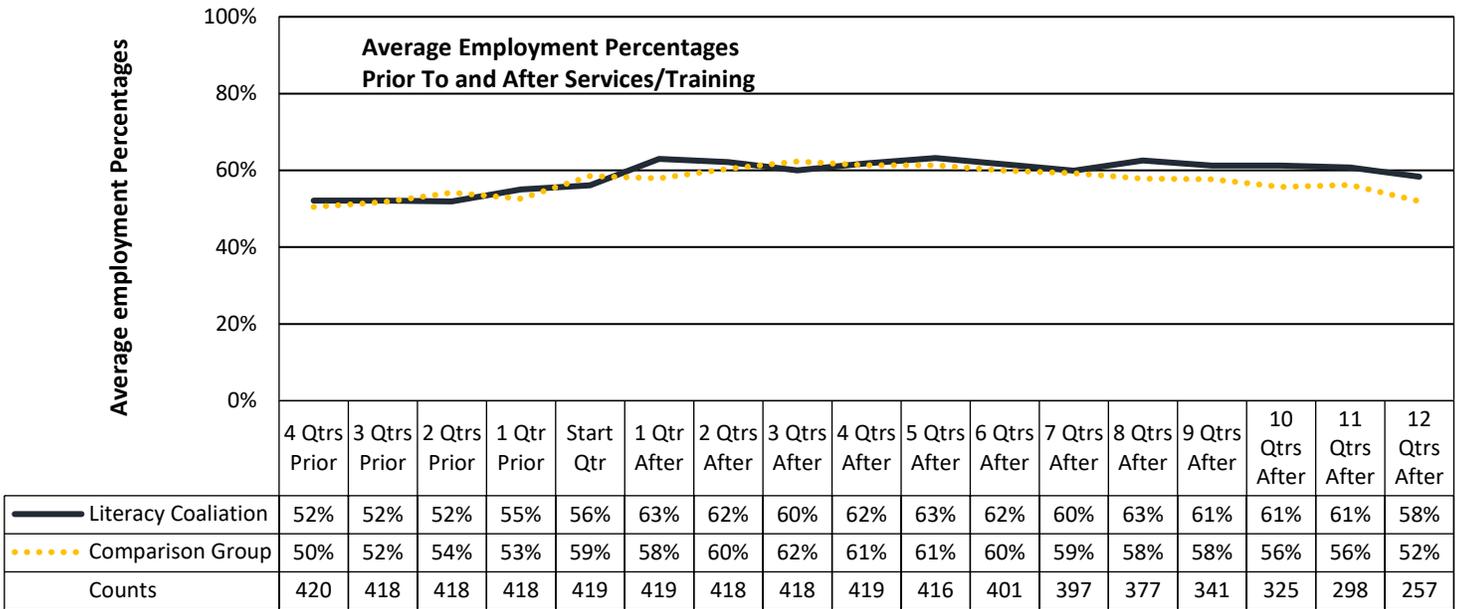
Table 7. Literacy Coalition Quarterly Impacts: FY 2016–FY 2020 (n=420)

Impact measure	All Qtrs Post service: Comparison Group	All Qtrs Post service: Treatment Group	Unadjusted Net Effect	Impact Measure
Quarterly Employment	57.8%	59.9%	2.1%	3.1%**
Average Quarterly Earnings	\$7,185	\$6,052	-\$1,133	-\$1,465**
Qualified for UI Benefits	46.3%	43.8%	-2.5%	0.0%
Filed UI Claim	0.56%	0.51%	-0.04%	-0.13%

Note: **=significant at p<.01; *= significant at p<.05

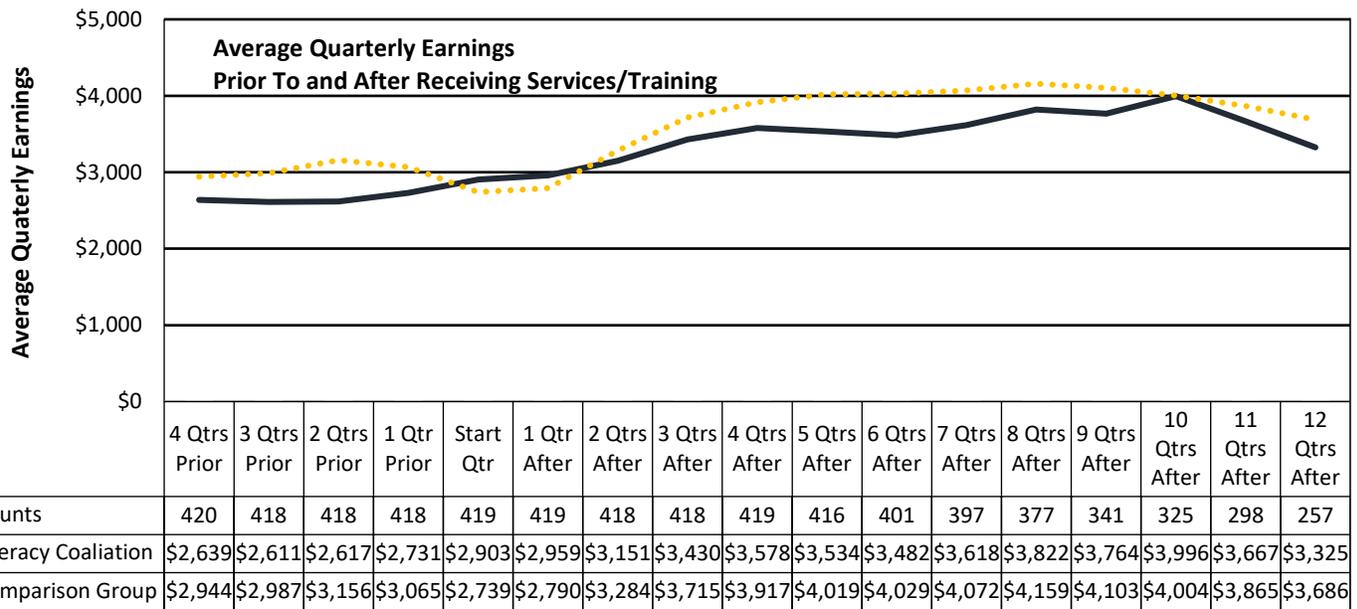
In Figure 3, the impact of participation in LCCT is examined by looking at participants' employment over time in relation to the comparison group's employment. The analysis shows that LCCT participant employment rates outpaced the control group members during the second quarter post services, and maintained higher employment rates over time compared to the comparison group.

Figure 3. Employment Rates Over Time, Literacy Coalition Participants vs. Comparison Group: FY 2016-FY 2020



In Figure 4, the impact of participation in LCCT is examined by looking at participants' earnings over time, regardless of employment status (i.e., unconditional earnings), in relation to the comparison group's unconditional earnings. The analysis shows that LCCT participants' earnings outpaced the comparison group during the entry and first quarter post service entry followed by a steady increase in earnings that did not keep pace with the increase in earnings for the control group. Earnings began to decline by the tenth quarter post service entry for both groups for those whom data are available.

Figure 4. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Literacy Coalition Participants vs. Comparison Group: FY 2016–FY 2020



WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAM PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS: FY 2017–FY 2019

Among the 327 FY 2017–FY 2019 Literacy Coalition participants with SSN’s identified in the data, 246 received work readiness skill building services, with 179 completing work readiness training.⁸ In addition, 51 FY 2018–FY 2019 participants enrolled in vocational training and all 51 completed the training receiving an industry recognized certification.

The outcomes evaluation exams participants’ labor market experiences prior to entering the program, and then tracking their labor market outcomes following program exit up to the 12th quarter post service for those whom data was available.

Participants Completing Work Readiness Training

Participant Outcomes

Table 8 provides an overview of labor market outcomes for 179 Literacy Coalition workforce readiness training completers. Prior to entering the program, 55.5 percent were employed in a UI-covered job in Texas. Average quarterly employment grew to 64.7 percent by the fourth quarter post service, increasing to 70.9 percent for the FY 2016 cohort in the eighth quarter post service. Overall, the data represents a 9.2 percentage point gain in employment between the year prior to services, and one year post service (employment outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 5).

The available data identifies that wages grew from an average of \$5,861 in the four quarters pre service to an average of \$7,238 four quarters post service: a \$1,377 average wage gain (earnings outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 6). The available data for the FY 2018 cohort reports a continued increase in earnings to \$8,490 during the eighth quarter post service representing a 44 percent increase in earnings from pre service quarters.

Overall, prior to entering workforce training, 44.4 percent of participants had sufficient employment and earnings histories to meet the monetary eligibility requirements for UI benefits. One year after leaving training, 59.9 percent met the requirements for eligibility. Few participants (1.4% overall) filed a claim for UI benefits in the period examined.

⁸ The data available for this report did not identify an adequate number of FY 2020 participants to include them in this report.

Table 8. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers in FY 2017–FY 2019

Cohort Outcome Measure	Four Qtrs Before Service	Last Qtr of Service	2nd Qtr Post service	4th Qtr Post service	8th Qtr Post service	12th Qtr Post service	16th Qtr Post service	All Post service Qtrs
Number of Participants:								
FY 2017	55	55	55	55	55	55	.	
FY 2018	87	87	87	87	87	10	.	
FY 2019	37	37	37	37	.	.	.	
Overall	179	179	179	179	142	65	.	
Quarterly Employment:								
FY 2017	55.0%	70.9%	63.6%	67.3%	70.9%	65.5%	.	66.8%
FY 2018	58.3%	66.7%	66.7%	65.5%	59.8%	60.0%	.	63.8%
FY 2019	53.4%	75.7%	67.6%	62.2%	.	.	.	65.8%
Overall	55.5%	68.5%	64.7%	64.7%	64.6%	64.6%	.	64.7%
Average Qrtly Earnings:								
FY 2017	\$5,429	\$6,282	\$6,236	\$5,631	\$6,553	\$6,425	.	\$6,214
FY 2018	\$5,885	\$5,935	\$7,147	\$7,735	\$8,490	\$7,743	.	\$7,765
FY 2019	\$6,668	\$6,920	\$8,793	\$9,724	.	.	.	\$9,162
Overall	\$5,861	\$6,196	\$7,138	\$7,328	\$7,653	\$6,613	.	\$7,267
Qualified for UI Benefits:								
FY 2017	46.8%	47.3%	52.7%	61.8%	61.8%	67.3%	.	60.9%
FY 2018	44.0%	50.6%	56.3%	57.5%	62.1%	50.0%	.	58.3%
FY 2019	46.0%	56.8%	54.1%	67.6%	.	.	.	60.5%
Overall	44.4%	49.2%	54.0%	59.9%	61.8%	64.6%	.	59.0%
Filed UI Claim:								
FY 2017	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	.	0.9%
FY 2018	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	.	1.1%
FY 2019	2.0%	0.0%	5.4%	0.0%	.	.	.	2.6%
Overall	1.1%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	2.1%	1.5%	.	1.4%

Source: Literacy Coalition participant records and Texas Workforce Commission UI wage and claim records.

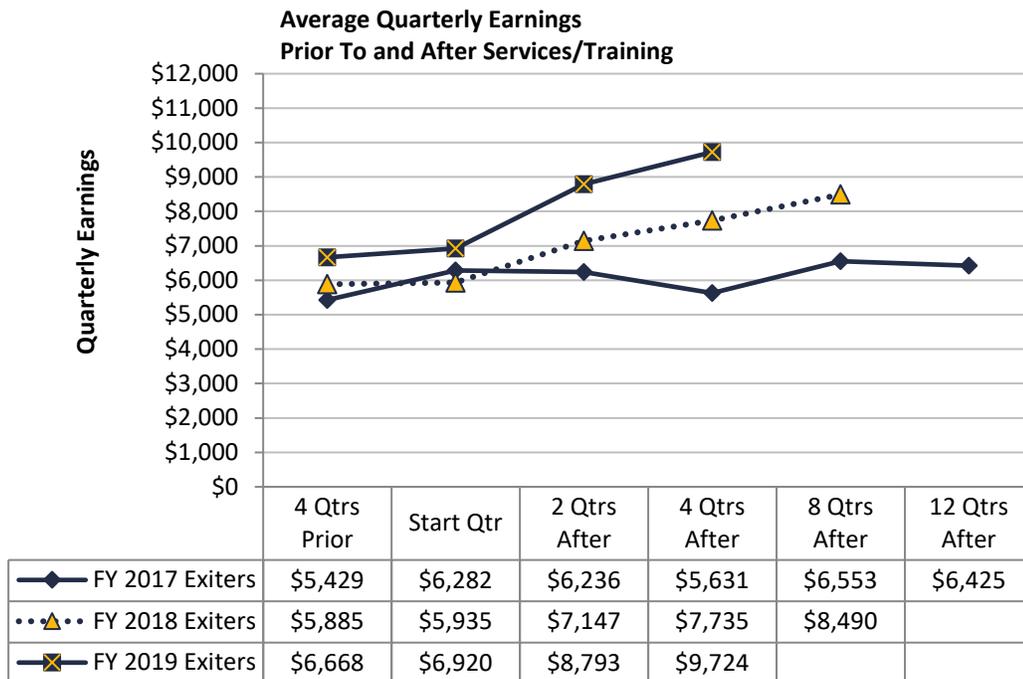
Note: The highlighted cells in the *Number of Participants* columns represent the number of participants who exited the program during the 1st or 2nd quarters of their cohort fiscal year, allowing these exiters to be represented in the identified quarter. The shaded cells represent the percentage of these participants found in the UI wage data. For example, in FY 2018, 10 participants had exit dates that allowed their post service quarters to extend to 12 qtrs and 60% of the 10 were identified as employed in the data. Post service quarters with low cohort counts were not included in the outcomes graphs.

Note: A dot represents too few participants (<10), no data to report, or insufficient time passing to report for that timeframe. Participants were counted as employed if they were found in Texas UI wage records. Those who were not found may be unemployed, employed outside of Texas, or employed in Texas in a position that is not UI-covered and reported to TWC.

Figure 5. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers Average Quarterly Employment: FY 2017–FY 2019



Figure 6. Literacy Coalition Workforce Readiness Training Completers Average Quarterly Earnings: FY 2017–FY 2019



Program Impacts

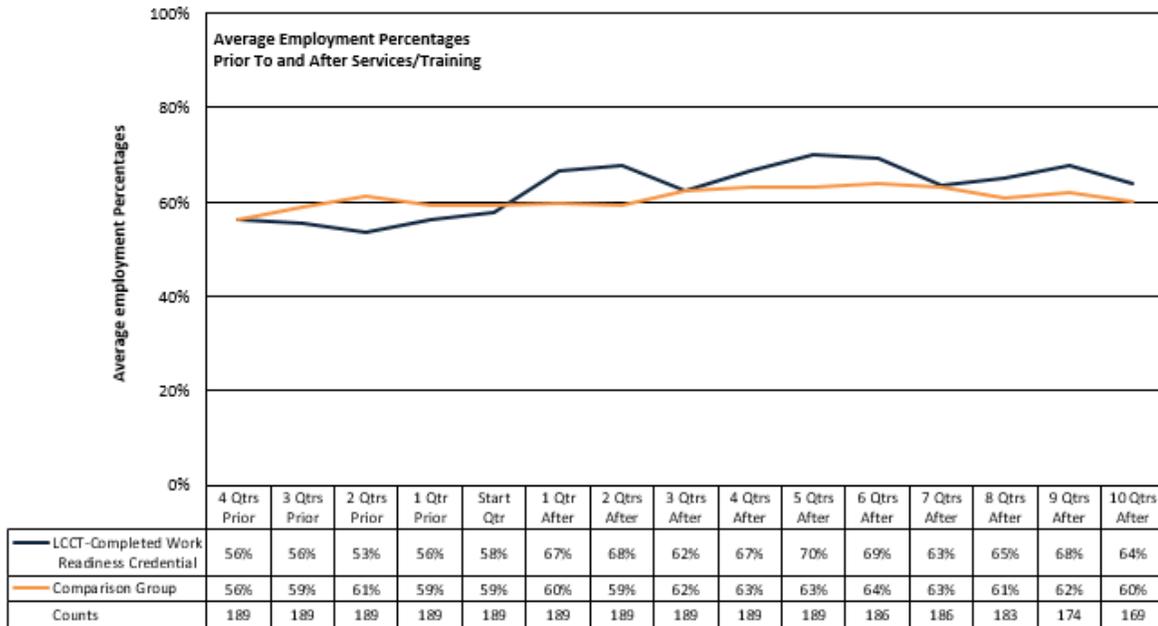
Table 9 presents findings from the impacts analysis comparing the outcomes of 189 LCCT program FY 2017–FY 2019 exiters who completed workforce readiness training, to the outcomes of a matched comparison group. The table presents impacts only for exiters for whom adequate matching could be performed. Participation in Literacy Coalition programs was positively associated, and statistically significant, with one of the outcomes measured: an increase in quarterly employment (4.1%). Participation was also associated with statistically significant lower quarterly earnings of \$1,148.

Table 9. Quarterly Impacts: Participants Workforce Readiness Training Completers: FY 2017–FY 2019 (n=189)

Impact measure	All Qtrs Post service: Comparison Group	All Qtrs Post service: Treatment Group	Unadjusted Net Effect	Impact Measure
Quarterly Employment	60.7%	64.8%	4.1%	4.1%*
Average Quarterly Earnings	\$7,930	\$7,252	-\$678	-\$1148**
Qualified for UI Benefits	51.7%	47.4%	-4.3%	0.0%
Filed UI Claim	0.46%	0.45%	-0.01%	-0.20%

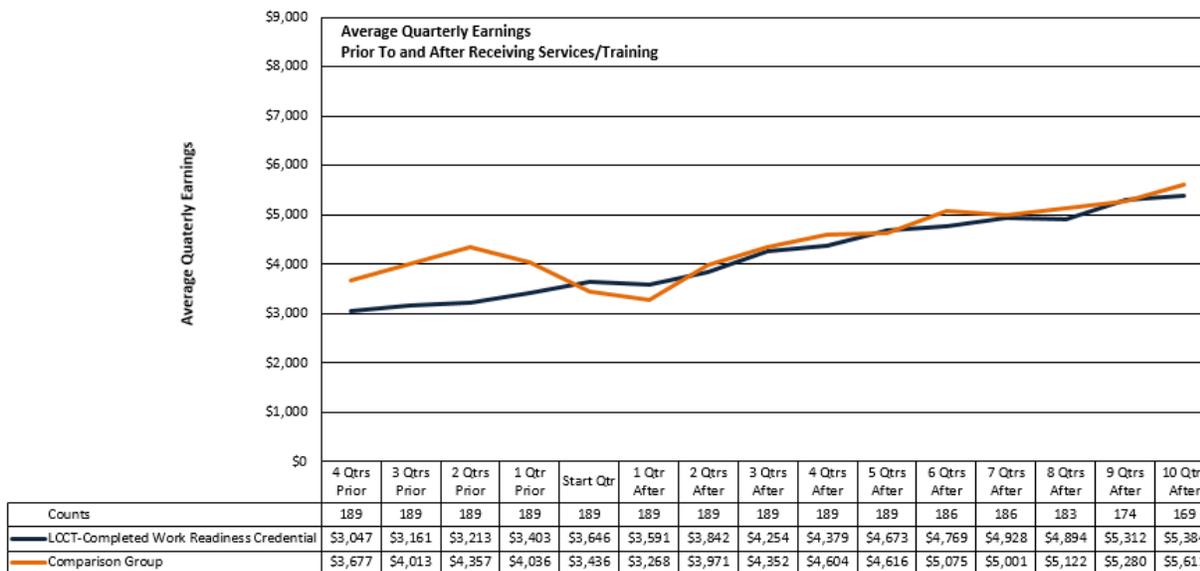
In Figure 7, the impact of completing workforce readiness training is examined by looking at participants' employment over time in relation to the comparison group's employment. The analysis shows that LCCT participant employment rates outpaced the control group members during the quarter services began. Employment rates fluctuated matching the comparison group in the third and seventh quarters post service entry.

Figure 7. Employment Rates Over Time, Workforce Readiness Training Completer vs. Comparison Group: FY 2017-FY 2019



In Figure 8, the impact of completing workforce readiness training is examined by looking at participants' earnings over time, regardless of employment status (i.e., unconditional earnings), in relation to the comparison group's unconditional earnings. The analysis shows that LCCT participants' earnings slightly outpaced the comparison group during the entry and first quarter post service entry followed by a steady increase in earnings that kept pace with the increase in employment for the control group.

Figure 8. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Workforce Readiness Training Completer vs. Comparison Group: FY 2017–FY 2019



Participants completing vocational training and received industry recognized certificate

Participant Outcomes

The LCCT FY 2018 and FY 2019 cohort data includes a group of 51 participants who completed vocational training and received an industry recognized certificate.⁹ Table 9 presents employment and earnings outcomes for this group of program participants. Prior to entering the program, 62.5 percent were employed in a UI-covered job in Texas. One year after services, the average quarterly employment for the FY 2018 cohort grew to 81 percent, representing a 29.6 percentage point gain in employment. The FY 2019 cohort experienced a decrease in employment from 83.3 percent during the last service

⁹ The data available for this report did not identify an adequate number of FY 2020 participants to include them in this report.

quarter, to 66.7 percent in the fourth quarter post service. This decrease in employment may be an indicator of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment beginning in March of 2020 (employment outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 7).

The data identifies that overall wages grew from an average of \$7,497 in the four quarters preservice, to an average of \$9,748 by the fourth quarter post service, a \$2,241 average wage gain. The FY 2018 cohort wages grew from \$8,144 prior to services, to \$11,026 during the eighth quarter post services, a \$2,882 wage increase representing a 35.3 percentage point earnings increase (earnings outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 8).

Overall, prior to entering workforce training, 48.6 percent of participants had sufficient employment and earnings histories to meet the monetary eligibility requirements for UI benefits. Four quarters after leaving training, 75 percent met the requirements for eligibility. Overall few participants (1.5%) filed a claim for UI benefits in the period examined.

Table 10. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification FY 2018–FY 2019

Cohort Outcome Measure	Four Qtrs Before Service	Last Qtr of Service	2nd Qtr Post service	4th Qtr Post service	8th Qtr Post service	12th Qtr Post service	All Post service Qtrs
Number of Participants:							
FY 2018	21	21	21	21	21	.	
FY 2019	30	30	30	30	.	.	
Overall	51	51	51	51	21	.	
Quarterly Employment:							
FY 2018	71.4%	90.5%	81.0%	81.0%	81.0%	.	79.1%
FY 2019	56.7%	83.3%	73.3%	66.7%	.	.	70.5%
Overall	62.5%	84.6%	75.0%	73.1%	81.8%	.	74.6%
Average Qrtly Earnings:							
FY 2018	\$8,144	\$8,359	\$9,153	\$9,309	\$11,026	.	\$9,998
FY 2019	\$7,088	\$7,237	\$9,182	\$10,291	.	.	\$9,797
Overall	\$7,497	\$7,721	\$9,169	\$9,748	\$11,160	.	\$9,871
Qualified for UI Benefits:							
FY 2018	45.2%	61.9%	90.5%	81.0%	81.0%	.	82.1%
FY 2019	49.2%	66.7%	63.3%	73.3%	.	.	68.9%
Overall	48.6%	63.5%	73.1%	75.0%	81.8%	.	74.6%
Filed UI Claim:							
FY 2018	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.	0.0%
FY 2019	2.5%	0.0%	6.7%	0.0%	.	.	3.3%
Overall	1.4%	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	.	1.5%

Source: Literacy Coalition participant records and Texas Workforce Commission UI wage and claim records.

Note: A dot represents too few participants (<10), no data to report, or insufficient time passing to report for that timeframe. Participants were counted as employed if they were found in Texas UI wage records. Those who were not found may be unemployed, employed outside of Texas, or employed in Texas in a position that is not UI-covered and reported to TWC.

Figure 9. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification Average Quarterly Employment: FY 2018–FY 2019

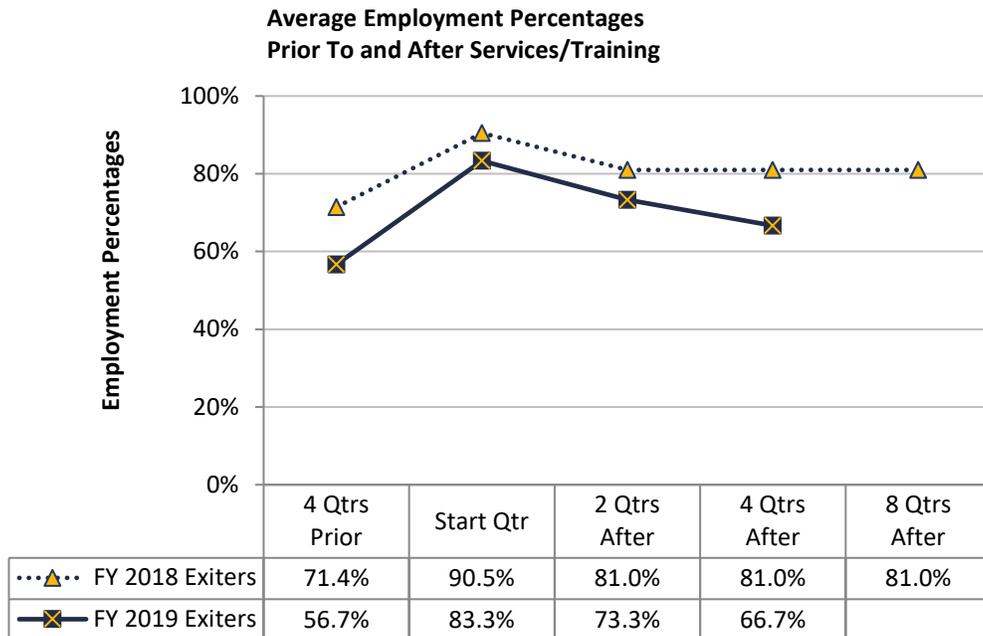
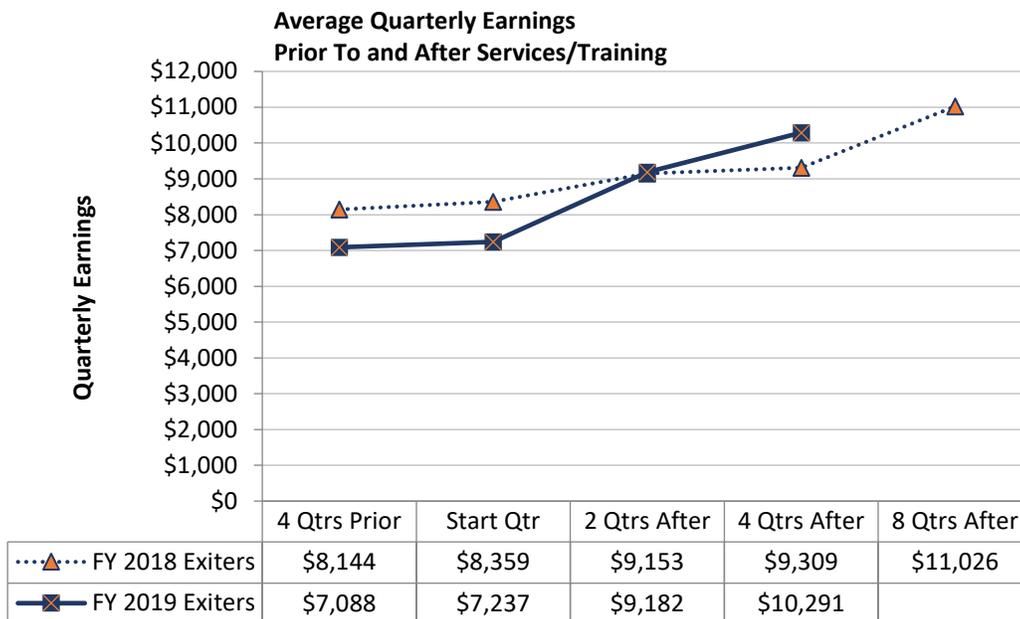


Figure 10. Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification Average Quarterly Earnings: FY 2018–FY 2019



Program Impacts

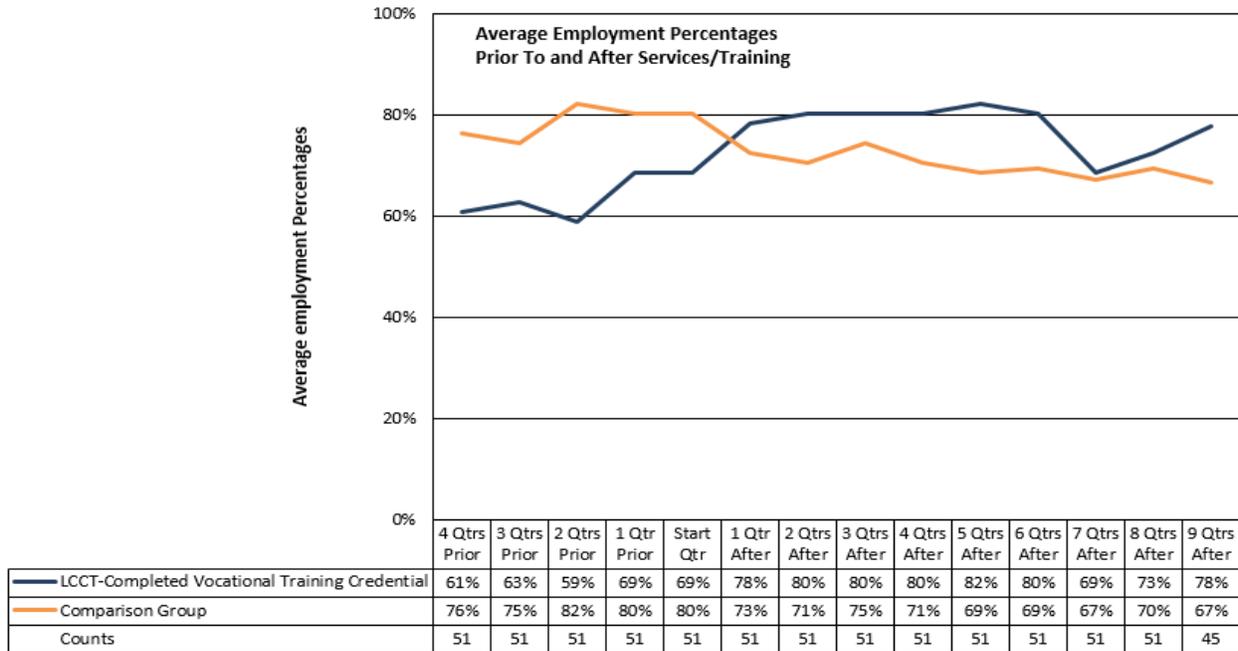
Table 11 presents findings from the impacts analysis comparing the outcomes of 51 Literacy Coalition FY 2018–FY 2019 exiters who completed vocational training and received an industry recognized certification to the outcomes of a matched comparison group. Earning an industry recognized certification was positively associated with one of the outcomes measured: an increase in quarterly employment (9.4%). Participation was also associated with lower quarterly earnings of \$787.

Table 11. Quarterly Impacts: Literacy Coalition Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification FY 2018–FY 2019 (n=51)

Impact measure	All Qtrs Post service: Comparison Group	All Qtrs Post service: Treatment Group	Unadjusted Net Effect	Impact Measure
Quarterly Employment	69.5%	76.7%	7.2%	9.4%
Average Quarterly Earnings	\$9,623	\$9,714	\$91	-\$787
Qualified for UI Benefits	74.8%	62.2%	-12.7%	0.0%
Filed UI Claim	0.37%	0.00%	-0.37%	0.00%

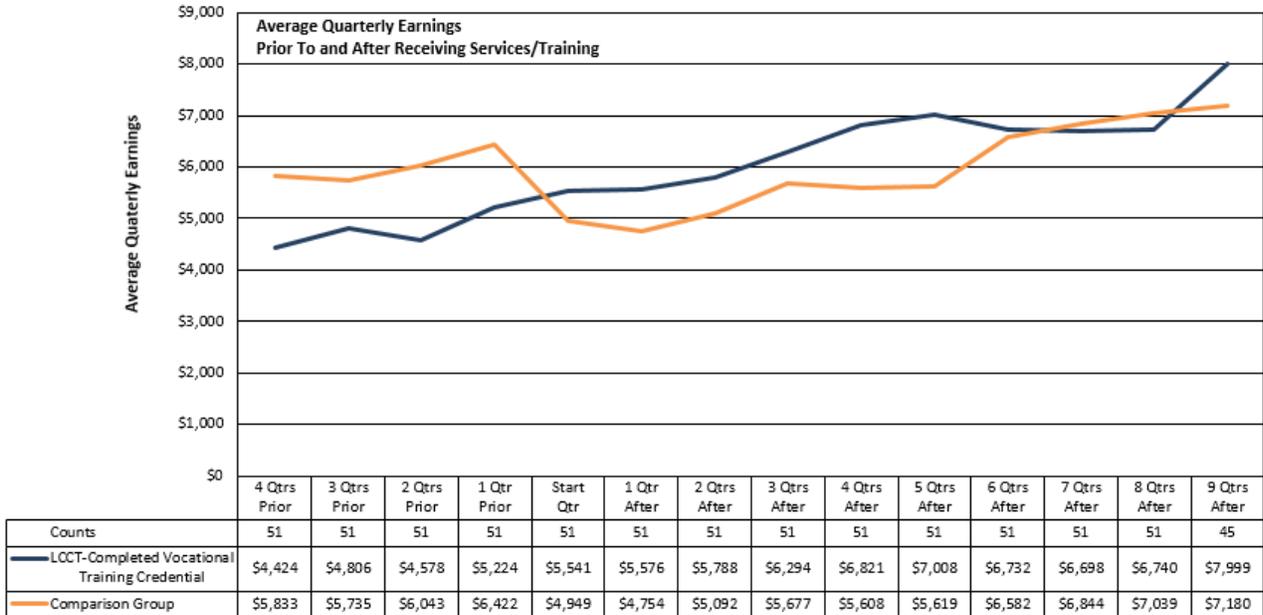
In Figure 11, the impact of completing vocational skills training and earning an industry recognized certification is examined by looking at participants’ employment over time in relation comparison group’s employment. The analysis shows that the LCCT certification earning participants employment rate outpaced the control group members during the first quarter post services, and maintained higher employment rates over time until the seventh quarter post services. In the seventh quarter employment impacts were matched for the two groups. In the remaining quarters for LCCT participants found in the data, LCCT participants experiencing another increase in the employment rate compared to the control group.

Figure 11. Employment Rates Over Time, Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification vs. Comparison Group: FY 2018–FY 2019



In Figure 12, the impact of completing vocational skills training and earning an industry recognized certification is examined by looking at participants’ earnings over time, regardless of employment status (i.e., unconditional earnings), in relation to the comparison group’s unconditional earnings. The analysis shows that LCCT participants’ earnings outpaced the comparison group during the quarter they entered services maintaining a steady increase in earnings. In the sixth quarter post service the LCCT participants earnings slightly decreased and leveled off matching the earnings of the control group until the ninth quarter post service when earnings for LCCT participants increases again to outpace the control group earnings.

Figure 12. Unconditional Earnings Over Time, Participants Receiving Industry Recognized Certification vs. Comparison Group: FY 2018–FY 2019



DISCUSSION OF PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

The original TFLA evaluation design analyzed a limited time frame and offered few SSNs to be identified in the workforce data. Other mitigating factors (i.e., the pandemic and winter storm), restrained recruitment efforts, and the retention and reengagement of program participants. In an effort to provide additional insight into the employment and earnings outcomes and impacts of LCCT services, RMC included in this report the findings from the Travis County Health and Human Services Workforce Investment Evaluation (2021).

Table 12 presents the fourth quarter post service labor market outcomes for all LCCT participants who appear in the workforce data, along with outcomes for the two subgroups: workforce readiness training completers, and those earning an industry recognized certification. The data illustrates the career development pathway opportunities LCCT offers participants: demonstrating the increases in employment, wages, and employment stability (evident in the increase in those qualifying for UI wage benefits).

Table 12. Participant Outcomes Four Quarters Post Service

Four Quarters Post Service	All LCCT Participants FY 2016-FY2020 n=425	Workforce Readiness Training Completers FY 2017-FY2019 n=187	Receiving Industry Recognized Cert. FY 2018-FY 2019 n=51
Employment	61.7%	64.7%	73.1%
Earnings	\$6,176	\$7,328	\$9,748
Qualified for UI Benefits	53.9%	59.9%	75.0%
Filed UI Claim:	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%

In Table 13, the impact of receiving LCCT services, completing workforce readiness training, and earning an industry recognized certification is examined by looking at participants’ earnings over time in relation to the comparison group. Statistically significant employment impacts are reported for two of the groups: all LCCT participants and those completing workforce readiness training. Although the impact on employment for those participants receiving an industry recognized certification is also positive, the low number of individuals in the participant and comparison groups limits the capacity of the data to identify the finding as statistically significant. The data reports a statistically significant negative effect on earnings; however, as identified in the outcomes figures presented earlier in this report, all three groups of participants experience an increase in earning overtime.

There is one caution in interpreting the data: embedded in the “all LCCT participants” group are the two sub groups. Further, the workforce readiness training completers group includes those receiving an industry recognized credential.

Table 13. Program Impacts Four Quarters Post Service

Impact measure	All LCCT Participants FY 2016-FY2020 n=420	Workforce Readiness Training Completers FY 2017-FY2019 n=187	Received Industry Recognized Cert. FY 2018-FY 2019 n=51
Quarterly Employment	3.1%**	4.1%*	9.4%
Average Quarterly Earnings	-\$1,465**	-\$1148**	-\$787
Qualified for UI Benefits	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Filed UI Claim	-0.13%	-0.20%	0.00%

Recommendations

- ❖ Continue working with partners to develop strategies to obtain SSNs that will not be perceived as undermining the mission of the programs.
- ❖ In order to produce meaningful outcomes and impacts, structure evaluations to include longer periods of time for analysis, perhaps a rolling three years or more.
- ❖ To strengthen the intent to compare outcomes and impacts for distinctive types of services, sufficient numbers of individuals with SSNs must be represented in each group of participants identified as receiving the different types of services.

Analysis of Interviews: AmeriCorps Members and Site Supervisors

The following section reports on the analysis of interviews of AmeriCorps members and site supervisors of four programs implementing the TFLA program services. Sites serve unique populations and rely on the unique individual strengths, skills, and talents of each AmeriCorps volunteer.

LCCT staff identified sites and individuals to recruit for interviews and sent all selected individuals an introductory email. Due to restrictions imposed on face-to-face meetings to control the spread of COVID-19, interviews were conducted via zoom at a time agreed upon by both participant and interviewer. Interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Throughout the interviews, the interviewer typed responses to each question in an excel spreadsheet (see Appendix D: Participant and Supervisor Interviews). A content analysis was conducted to code and classify responses, identify themes, and the frequency of similar responses. The data was then triangulated with information from conversations and email exchanges with staff, an interview with the coordinator of social services, along with a review of the available information presented on each program website. The following information reports on the analysis and synthesis of the interview data.

LCCT provides new AmeriCorps members with orientation and training prior to working at their assigned sites. Once members arrive at their sites, additional training is provided on procedures and information specific to their work site and the population they will be serving. AmeriCorps job coaches meet with and receive ongoing support from their cohort, the LCCT AmeriCorps administrators, and their site supervisor and team.

The LCCT staff have identified that many program participants have experienced violence and trauma. Staff and AmeriCorps members have received training in trauma informed practice to 1) recognize the pervasive impact of trauma on individuals, families, and communities; 2) inform service delivery; and 3) prepare staff to make appropriate referrals for support and services. AmeriCorps members also receive training on motivational interviewing, a style of relationship building that supports participants to overcome internal barriers to realizing their goals. These trainings also emphasize the need for AmeriCorps members to care for themselves, assert appropriate boundaries within their role, and seek support.¹⁰

¹⁰ Information from a conversation with Adam Benden, LMSW, Director of Social Services, LCCT. March 2021.

ANALYSIS OF AMERICORPS MEMBER INTERVIEWS

How did you learn about this opportunity to volunteer with LCCT? Did you receive all the information you needed about the program in a timely manner? Was the onboarding process efficient?

All members reported being aware of AmeriCorps prior to pursuing their current term of service. One member specified that she recalls a high school teacher talking about AmeriCorps. Members learned of specific service opportunity from friends, through contacts with a program service site, or through their initial pursuit of information about AmeriCorps opportunities.

Members reported receiving information about the LCCT AmeriCorps program in a timely manner and found staff consistently available to answer questions. Members described the onboarding process as “quick” and “. . . it happened really fast.”

Three members mentioned some initial confusion on how AmeriCorps, LCCT, and the service sites work together, and what aspects of their roll would be conducted virtually and what would be offered face-to-face.

What are your responsibilities in your current role? What supports at the beginning and throughout your experience with LCCT have you received to fulfill your responsibilities, such as program orientation, training, ongoing professional development, supervision, and peer support?

Members identified as career coaches and teachers with responsibilities as case managers, family advocates, translators, interpreters, and for some, various other tasks in support of their site and program participants. Some members mentioned that while the pandemic created barriers to participant recruitment and service delivery, they were willing to be flexible to fulfill other tasks to benefit the programs and participants.

Members agreed that the original orientation and training prior to the beginning of their site assignment was helpful in preparing them. All members specifically identified the benefits of the trauma informed care and motivational interviewing trainings, along with training regarding issues of self-care. Some identified that inherent in the AmeriCorps experience are new challenges that are difficult to prepare for: “At the time [during training] you think your

Trauma-informed principles are relatively new in educational settings. Their efficiency in mental health and social work with adults is well documented (Muskett 2014).

questions are answered, but you get out here, they can't prepare you for what you're getting into." and "I don't think anyone could be fully ready for this job . . . being 22 years old and still learning how to do things for myself . . . with each family I learn more that prepares me to work with the next family."

Members who reported feeling well prepared by their service site responsibilities described receiving structured orientation and training specific to their service site, clear expectation of their job duties, along with ongoing support from their site supervisor, site team members, and LCCT AmeriCorps administrators.

Another factor that appears to contribute to a sense of support upon arriving at their service site, was the site structure for recruiting and retaining program participants. Those members working at sites where group of specific participants were assigned for members to work with reported experiencing better prepared than those members at sites where the members themselves were responsible for developing outreach efforts to recruit program participants. A challenge heightened during the pandemic as traditional avenues for recruiting participants were not available.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the services you are providing?

For some members, providing virtual educational services posed a number of challenges that interrupted the natural flow of teaching a group of students and inhibited participants experiencing being a part of a group. Also, pandemic driven changes in the local labor market were noted: "Finding jobs is the hardest part right now. It's really hard for people to find jobs."

Some typically avenues for recruitment were not available and some service sites experienced low numbers of participants.

One member summed up pandemic frustrations as follows: "The biggest thing with COVID is that everyone is struggling. Offices are closed for various services. For example, you need a SSN to apply for SNAP, but the closest SSN office is closed so we had to drive an hour away to another office to apply for an SSN. Barriers in that organizations we would usually use are

closed. Everything takes more time. COVID has placed an entire layer of barriers on to the process.”

Based on your experience, what barriers do participants experience in accessing and staying engaged with LCCT services?

Members leading virtual instruction observed the digital divide: students having limited access to computers and Wi-Fi. Further, members mentioned the limitation of the virtual environment on the social aspect of learning, the social support that students receive from each other in a classroom setting isn’t replicable in a virtual environment: “. . . technical issues make it difficult because meeting with others and talking with other students is a big part of the process, people are in their cars using their phone, they don’t have a quiet space, and we have issues with connectivity.” Members discussed the general sense of instability related to the pandemic undermined the consistency and stability of participation in programs.

Also, members mentioned a general lack of digital literacy. Program participants often lack skills to negotiate the internet to their benefit, such as how to access information on a typical webpage, use google maps, and other computer applications that can be of benefit.

One member discussed cultural issues that can also create a hurdle for participants to work through, such as varying concepts of time and what it means to “be on time,” working in different weather conditions, and accepting work that may be viewed as undesirable by participants.

AmeriCorps members discussed challenges in motivating participants to access job coaching services when an increase in income could upend the stability of the household, and the family’s access to social services such as housing, Medicare, and other forms of financial assistance. One member stated, “Families are making decisions for their family’s stability.”

What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your role?

Again, members repeated issues with student access to computers and adequate Wi-Fi. For example, one member stated, “. . . when something doesn’t click with a student online, how do I adjust the class to meet the needs of that student, [the virtual class] doesn’t flow well with the needs of the students.”

A few members discussed their struggles in feeling “good” about maintaining their professional boundaries. Members report receiving training on maintaining professional boundaries, and

receiving support from site supervisors and AmeriCorps administration, yet struggle to feel settled within themselves about this process.

Looking back on your first few days working with program participants, is there anything you wish you had been better prepared for?

The general experience most members described during their initial site placement was summed up by one member as follows: “There is no way to be fully prepared, you just need to jump in and learn as you go. There are so many different things that can happen, and experiences clients have.”

Members mentioned the original zoom training with LCCT on various scenarios was helpful yet less effective than the training received at the service site. Training on various scenarios at the service sites and the ongoing opportunities to listen to the firsthand experiences of other site workers was noted to be very helpful.

Some members experienced being emotionally unprepared and feeling powerless at times. Others expressed the work requires them to be more flexible with participants than they had anticipated.

What improvements could be made to the program, if any?

Suggestions for improvements included: Spanish classes for members with limited Spanish speaking skills; more training opportunities grounded in the reality of the types of challenges members may face and how to respond to program participant and within themselves.

“Scenarios that help and give examples of setting boundaries to be sure neither party gets hurt;” and, some members stated that not all training is a good match for all members. Members with life and work experience may have different training needs compared to members with less work and life experience.

What have you learned that will be beneficial to you in your career both professionally and personally?

Members returned to their discussion of the value of the trauma informed care and motivational interviewing training received from LCCT. Members expressed how this specific training made them more thoughtful about how they view others, the situations, and circumstances of the lives of others, and how they view themselves. Members mentioned developing a deeper understanding of the connections between literacy, education, health, and

wellbeing. Further, members expressed gaining a greater understanding of themselves and their position in the world, their privilege, and opportunities.

One member expressed the impact the trauma informed care and motivational interviewing training has had: “It makes work feel more worth it because you know you’re there . . . to help and think beyond the surface level.”

ANALYSIS OF SITE SUPERVISOR INTERVIEWS

What are your responsibilities in your current role as site supervisor? How long have you been in this role? What supports, at the beginning and throughout your experience with LCCT, have you received to fulfill your responsibilities? Such as: program orientation, training, ongoing professional development, supervision, and peer support?

Site supervisors interviewed for this analysis included managers and directors with over 30 years of cumulative experience in providing services, including AmeriCorps volunteer experience.

Site supervisors reported relying on LCCT to train the AmeriCorps members on adult education and ESL basics, and job coaching skills. Supervisors also mentioned the value of trauma informed care and motivational interviewing training particularly for AmeriCorps members coming from privileged backgrounds, those coming to service right out of college with little experience working with the population they will be serving.

Site supervisors expressed receiving support from LCCT AmeriCorps administrative team to ensure both the placement site and the AmeriCorps member have a positive experience.

How are participants recruited to participate in the program?

Recruitment strategies vary for each site dependent upon the target client population. Refugees and immigrants make their way to services through other agency referrals. The LCCT learning centers recruit through their online presence, accept referral from other organizations, and when available, job fairs and community events. The Housing Authority of the City of Austin AmeriCorps job coaches were responsible for designing and implementing outreach efforts to recruit directly from the target population to be served.

In your experience, what are the barriers participants experience in their efforts to enroll, and maintain participation in the program?

Site supervisors discussed the variety of supports and services participants need to be successful such as assistance with language translation, emergency needs, childcare, transportation, and dependable access to the internet. Program participants also need knowledge about how to access area resources and systems.

Site supervisors mentioned that many participants experience being overburdened (particularly during the pandemic) to meet the needs of family and maintain employment while pursuing their educational and career training goals. Also noted, many program participants struggle toward their goals while recovering from traumatic experiences and learning a new culture.

What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your role?

Site supervisors discussed both personal internal barriers and systemic barriers participants experience, as well as the additional challenges and disruption of services during the pandemic.

One site supervisor identified ““The biggest thing for us is to help people see the opportunity and take it.”

Programs that work with refugees and immigrants expressed the challenges in assisting participants obtain work. “The major barriers are in employment. They [participants] are in proceedings to apply for asylum and can’t get a work permit. There are challenges in getting work permits and in the meantime, they do day labor types of work.”

Regarding immigration systems in general, one site supervisor offered this comment: “In general, the immigration system is very clunky, inefficient, and really rough. Most people do not get very far in their legal system during the time we are with them. We get them oriented to being here [in Austin, TX].”

What improvements could be made to the program?

Overall, site supervisors were pleased with the program and few suggestions were made for program improvements. One site supervisor suggested LCCT become a GED testing center proposing this would be of benefit to participants and enhance the capacity of staff to support participants who are GED testing.

Any advice for future partner site supervisors?

Site supervisors expressed the importance of 1) placing members in roles where they can be successful and experience doing meaningful work, 2) creating opportunities for members to bond with their work site team and the larger AmeriCorps member cohort, 3) finding ways to let members know they are appreciated, and 4) If you have a member who isn't working out, address it immediately.

In addition, sites that are structured to rely on members to work independently, members would benefit from prior experience working with at-risk and underserved populations.

One supervisor mentioned, "Sometimes AmeriCorps can be intrusive with meetings, and it has its own set of rules to follow, you need to work within their structure."

Anything else you would like to share with me?

Site supervisors reported that LCCT administrative staff are supportive and responsive: "LCCT staff assist us [site managers] to keep on track with AmeriCorps requirements.

One site supervisor encourages LCCT to continue with virtual meetings with the AmeriCorps members post pandemic: "I hope they can keep some of this virtual connection. Going back and forth to the headquarters for LCCT to do in-person training or workshop, spending time transporting back and forth. If this stuff can be on Zoom. They can do the meeting and get some work done on site."

DISCUSSION OF SITE SUPERVISORS AND AMERICORPS MEMBERS INTERVIEWS

All interviewed AmeriCorps members clearly expressed an understanding of the value of the AmeriCorps experience. Likewise, all site supervisors described their partnership with LCCT and the AmeriCorps program to be of benefit to their programs.

AmeriCorps members and most site supervisors identified the trauma informed care and motivational interviewing trainings provided by LCCT, to be essential in preparing AmeriCorps members for their service experience. Further, the more training and guidance they received from their site supervisor, the more prepared they felt to fulfill their job responsibilities.

Each AmeriCorps member brings to their service unique life experiences that shape their perceptions of themselves, others, and the service they are dedicated to offering the community. Correspondingly, each AmeriCorps member may have unique training and/or support needs. Through

the process of interviewing AmeriCorps members, the researcher sensed a tension, or for some, a sadness, related to how the member viewed themselves within the systems they were working. As members fulfill their commitment to AmeriCorps, they learn about themselves, their potential, and limitations. This cohort of AmeriCorps members had the added stress of entering service during the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced the hardship of a severe winter storm in Central Texas. The pandemic and winter storm contributed to creating a general sense of uncertainty about life that was shared across the community, impacting daily life and service delivery. Although these circumstances are unique to this era, creating additional systems to identify individual needs and provide individualized guidance to seeking additional training or supportive counseling services may help to ensure that AmeriCorps members receive the support they need to sense internally the unique value they bring to their service.

Recommendations

- ❖ **Counseling Support:** Integrate into the program training and support services a normalization of seeking and accepting counseling services. It may be helpful to identify an assigned AmeriCorps counselor who can be introduced during orientation.
- ❖ **Referral Sources:** Service sites that rely on AmeriCorps members to create outreach activities to recruit program participants are well positioned to partner with programs that require participants to pursue self-sufficiency goals, such as reentry programs, TANF recipients, and youth receiving services through Communities in Schools.
- ❖ **Virtual Meetings:** AmeriCorps members who rely on public transportation can invest an entire work day getting to and from meetings held at the LCCT administration building. Virtual meetings allow members to remain on their site and is less disruptive to the work day. Admittedly, there is value in the cohort of members meeting face-to-face, there appears to be an opportunity to offer some virtual meetings to accommodate site activities.

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Appendix A: Description of Outcomes Table Elements

Outcomes Measure	Description
Number of Participants	This represents the total number of unduplicated participant SSNs found in the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) data across the time period examined. For each participant, the time <i>period examined</i> begins four quarters prior to program entry and extends to include all post-service quarters.
Quarterly Employment	This identifies the percentage of the <i>number of participants</i> found in the TWC data at any point during the <i>period examined</i> , who were employed based on wages submitted by employers to TWC.
Average Quarterly Earnings	This represents paid wages for individuals that were reported to TWC by employers.
Qualified for UI Benefits	This represents the share of participants who had sufficient employment and earnings histories to meet the monetary eligibility requirements for UI benefits. *
Filed UI Claim	This represents the share of participants who submitted an Unemployment Insurance (UI) application.

*Note: In Texas, monetary eligibility is based on the claimant earning sufficient wages in at least two quarters of the five quarters prior to filing a claim for benefits.

Appendix B: Description of Impact Table Elements

Impact measure	All Available Post-Service Qtrs Data: Comparison and Treatment Group	Unadjusted Net Effect	Impact Measure
Quarterly Employment	Group mean employment rate across all available quarters post-service.	Percentage point difference between mean employment rates for treatment and control groups.	Percentage point difference between mean employment rates for treatment and control group adjusted for any differences in their matching characteristics (Match characteristics include a number of variables that may influence the strength of the match relationship between the two groups, including demographics, prior employment status and earnings, etc.).
Average Quarterly Earnings	Group average earnings across all available quarters post-service.	Difference between the average earnings for treatment and control groups.	Difference between the average earnings for treatment and control group adjusted for any differences in their matching characteristics (Match characteristics include a number of variables that may influence the strength of the match relationship between the two groups, including demographics, prior employment status and earnings, etc.).
Qualified for UI Benefits	Percentage of group members who qualified for UI benefits across all available quarters post-service.	Percentage point difference between treatment and control group members who qualified for UI benefits.	Percentage point difference between treatment and control group members who qualified for UI benefits adjusted for any differences in their matching characteristics (Match characteristics include a number of variables that may influence the strength of the match relationship between the two groups, including demographics, prior employment status and earnings, etc.).
Filed UI Claim	Percentage of group members who filed a UI claim across all available quarters post-service.	Percentage point difference between treatment and control group members who filed a UI claim.	Percentage point difference between treatment and control group members who filed a UI claim adjusted for any differences in their matching characteristics (Match characteristics include a number of variables that may influence the strength of the match relationship between the two groups, including demographics, prior employment status and earnings, etc.).

Appendix C: Quasi-Experimental Impacts Analysis

In an attempt to measure the impacts of locally funded workforce services, researchers conducted a quasi-experimental analysis comparing labor market outcomes for workforce participants with those of a comparison group of similar non-participants. Quasi-experimental analysis has been shown to produce impact estimates comparable to those resulting from more rigorous and costly approaches involving the use of experimental designs that randomly assign individuals to treatment and control status.¹¹ In fact, for some groups, quasi-experimental estimates tend to understate employment and earnings impacts from workforce services. For these reasons, results presented in this report should be considered conservative estimates of the true impacts.

Quasi-experimental approaches tend to work well when participants for whom comparison groups are being created have sufficient prior employment and earnings histories and when data are available on a sufficient number of variables with which to perform the requisite match. Youth and ex-offenders are problematical in this regard precisely because their prior employment and earnings histories are either lacking or difficult to determine.

Potential comparison group members were drawn from two sources: individuals who either registered to look for employment using the state's *WorkinTexas* (WIT) program or who received "core" services under the Workforce Investment Act or WIA (such as job-matching or resume development). Thus, the comparison group selected as described below is not a "no-services," but rather a "low-intensity services" group. The resulting impact estimates thus reflect the incremental value of the community's investments in workforce services.

Workforce services participants were matched on a one-to-one basis with potential comparison group members using a method known as propensity score matching. Matching was done by selecting for each participant the one comparison group member judged most similar. Matching was done with replacement, with a caliper of 0.1 to remove the least similar matches.

Researchers were able to access matching variables for most participants in locally funded workforce services. Exact matches carried out included: county of residence; year of entry into the program; and whether or not individuals had recently experienced an earnings dip of 20% or more. Distance matches were also carried out on up to 11 variables by treating them as numeric and including

¹¹ For example, see Greenberg et al. (2006); Hollenbeck and Huang (2006); and Card et al. (2009).

them in the overall multivariate distance measurement. These variables included: age (for those participants with a recorded birth date); gender; race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic); time since first earnings; employed at entry; percent of time employed over four years prior to program entry; average quarterly earnings over four years prior to program entry; percent of time in any workforce development service in the year immediately prior to program entry (matched according to service intensity: high for training programs, and low for job placement services); prior participation in any WIT service; any prior participation in Project RIO; any UI claims filed in the year prior to program entry; any UI benefits received in the year prior to program entry; and whether the individual's earnings history qualified for UI if he/she were to lose a job. For those experiencing a recent earnings dip, the time since the earnings dip and the percent of earnings represented by the dip were also included in the matching process. Table D1 identifies the covariates used in the development of the propensity scores for creating matches for each program.

The adequacy of each comparison group for the quasi-experimental impacts analysis was judged by performing t-tests. These tests compared treatment and comparison groups on the same dimensions. If the groups were statistically different at $p < .01$ on two or more dimensions, the comparison was considered inadequate.

Appendix D: Interview Guides

Literacy Coalition AmeriCorps Volunteer Interview Guide

Introductions

Research Team (Cynthia Juniper, RMC)

Interviewees (Name, Title, Program Role)

Purpose of this Interview

Under Literacy Coalition of Central Texas' grant from Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps (TFLA) Initiative, the Ray Marshall Center at The University of Texas at Austin is conducting a study to evaluate the impact of the TFLA initiative on participant job attainment and/or advancement. This evaluation seeks to gain insight into program aspects that contribute to participant's goal attainment and to identify any program aspects that may benefit from enhancements. As part of this study, I am interviewing a number of AmeriCorps members and partner site supervisors.

I primarily want to learn from your experiences and perspectives, and to document the ongoing implementation of the TFLA initiative.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If it's acceptable to you I will record our conversation (via Zoom), largely to help in capturing our discussions and making sure I get the facts straight. I will seek your approval in advance for any comments we may want to use in the RMC report. We will not directly quote individuals by name.

DATE:	TIME:
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas	
Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps Initiative	
Invite: AmeriCorps Volunteer	

<p>1. How did you learn about this opportunity to volunteer with LCCT?</p> <p>a. Did you receive all the information you needed about the program in a timely manner?</p> <p>b. Was the onboarding process efficient?</p>
<p>2. What are your responsibilities in your current role? What supports, at the beginning and throughout your experience with LCCT, have you received to fulfill your responsibilities? Such as: program orientation, training, ongoing professional development, supervision, and peer support?</p>
<p>3. How has COVID-19 influenced the services you are providing?</p>
<p>4. Based on your experience, what barriers do participants experience in accessing and staying engaged with LCCT services?</p>
<p>5. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your role?</p> <p>a. Digital Equity?</p>
<p>6. Looking back on your first few days working with program participants, is there anything you wish you had been better prepared for?</p>
<p>7. What improvements could be made to the program?</p>
<p>8. What have you learned that will be beneficial to you in your career both professionally and personally?</p>
<p>9. Anything else you would like to share with me?</p>

Literacy Coalition Site Supervisor Interview Guide

Introductions

Research Team (Cynthia Juniper, RMC)

Interviewees (Name, Title, Program Role)

Purpose of this Interview

Under Literacy Coalition of Central Texas' grant from Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps (TFLA) Initiative, the Ray Marshall Center at The University of Texas at Austin is conducting a study to evaluate the impact of the TFLA initiative on participant job attainment and/or advancement. This evaluation seeks to gain insight into program aspects that contribute to participant's goal attainment and to identify any program aspects that may benefit from enhancements. As part of this study, I am interviewing a number of AmeriCorps members and partner site supervisors.

I primarily want to learn from your experiences and perspectives, and to document the ongoing implementation of the TFLA initiative.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If it's acceptable to you I will record our conversation (via Zoom), largely to help in capturing our discussions and making sure I get the facts straight. I will seek your approval in advance for any comments we may want to use in the RMC report. We will not directly quote individuals by name.

DATE:	TIME:
Literacy Coalition of Central Texas	
Texas Family Literacy AmeriCorps Initiative	
Invitee: Site Supervisor	

1. What are your responsibilities in your current role as site supervisor? How long have you been in this role? What supports, at the beginning and throughout your experience with LCCT, have you received to fulfill your responsibilities? Such as: program orientation, training, ongoing professional development, supervision, and peer support?
2. How are participants recruited to participate in the program?
3. In your experience, what are the barriers participants experience in their efforts to enroll, and maintain their participation in, the program?
4. What are the biggest challenges you have faced in your role?
5. What improvements could be made to the program?
6. Any advice for future partner site supervisors?
7. Anything else you would like to share with me?