

POLICY BRIEF

One Summer Chicago Plus: Evidence Update 2017

SUMMARY

- The One Summer Chicago Plus (OSC+) program seeks to engage youth from the city's highest-violence areas and to provide them with a summer employment experience as a means to reduce violence involvement.
- In 2012 and 2013, Urban Labs researchers used a randomized controlled trial design to evaluate program effects on arrest, schooling, and employment outcomes.
- A new working paper on the OSC+ 2013 program finds that OSC+ reduces violent-crime arrests by 33 percent for participants in the 12 months after random assignment, or by 7.9 fewer arrests per 100 participants. This finding is similar to effects of the OSC+ 2012 program, which produced a 42 percent decline in violent-crime arrests over the same time period.
- Across both the 2012 and 2013 studies, the violence reduction stops growing after the first 12 months, though it remains substantively large after 2–3 years.
- While there is no overall program effect on school or employment outcomes during the 2- to 3-year follow-up period, one subgroup appears to benefit in terms of both employment and school outcomes. Members of this subgroup were younger, more school-engaged, less likely to have been arrested, more likely to be Hispanic, and living in neighborhoods with slightly lower unemployment rates than those who showed no improvements in employment.¹

INTRODUCTION

In Chicago, minority and low-income youth, especially males, face significant disadvantages in terms of criminal justice involvement and socioeconomic outcomes: 47 percent of black male residents between the ages of 20 and 24 are currently out of school and out of work,² while one in three black men will spend time in prison during their lifetimes, compared to just one in 17 white men.³ These disparities impose large social and economic costs and strain city, state, and federal resources.

Cities nationwide run summer jobs programs as a way to create opportunities for youth, which may help them stay out of trouble, earn money, build skills, and plan for the future. One Summer Chicago Plus, run by the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS),

¹ For full results and technical details, please see “Rethinking the Benefits of Youth Employment Programs: The Heterogeneous Effects of Summer Jobs” by Jonathan M.V. Davis and Sara B. Heller. Available here: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23443>.

² Córdova, Teresa L., Wilson Matthew D., and Morsey, Jackson C. “Lost: The Crisis of Jobless and Out of School Teens and Young Adults in Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.” Produced for: Alternative Schools Network. January 2016, Great Cities Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago.

³ Bonzcar, Thomas P. “Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001.” Bureau of Justice Statistics, (2003).

is one such program, specifically targeted toward disadvantaged youth. The program offers a 25-hour per week, minimum wage job to youth living in some of the city’s highest-violence neighborhoods, and provides job training, a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, and an adult job mentor to help participants overcome barriers to employment and learn to be successful employees.

In 2012 and 2013, researchers with the University of Chicago Urban Labs, in partnership with DFSS, studied the effects of OSC+. Because the program is over-subscribed—that is, there are more applicants than the program can serve—slots were distributed among applicants by lottery. In addition to being a fair way to allocate a limited resource, the lottery facilitates a rigorous randomized controlled trial that convincingly isolates the effects of the program, much like in a clinical trial in medicine. The initial study of the 2012 program found that it dramatically reduced violent-crime arrests over 16 months.⁴ This brief previews results from the 2013 study, which replicate and extend findings from the 2012 study.

THE OSC+ PARTICIPANT POPULATION SHIFTED FROM 2012 TO 2013

The 2013 program served a more justice-involved population to test whether the program could work for more disconnected youth. The tables below compare the programming and youth populations served across the two cohorts, which reflect changes to the recruitment strategy and eligibility criteria, as well as logistical constraints.

OSC+ Programming across Study Years

	2012 OSC+	2013 OSC+
Eligibility criteria and recruitment strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth ages 14–21 Recruited from high-violence high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All male, 16–22 years old Recruited from two pools: justice agencies and regular OSC applications from youth in high-violence neighborhoods
Program duration and size	Eight-week summer jobs program with 700 slots	Six-week summer jobs program with 1000 slots
Job type	Government and nonprofit minimum wage jobs (25 hours per week)	Government, nonprofit, and private sector jobs (25 hours per week)
Additional supports and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 day job readiness training, 1 meal/day, bus passes For half the youth, replace 2 job hours/day with social-emotional learning curriculum while keeping the same wage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 day job readiness training, 1 meal/day, bus passes Everyone gets SEL, with some post-summer activities

The 2012 program recruited youth ages 14–21 from high schools in high-violence neighborhoods. Because males are disproportionately involved in violence, OSC+ 2013 was open only to males ages 16–22. Half the participants were referred from criminal justice agencies and half were drawn from regular OSC applications from youth living in high-violence neighborhoods. As shown below, the shift in recruitment strategy and eligibility criteria meant

⁴ Heller, Sara B. “Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth.” *Science* 346 (2014), 1219-1223.

that 2013 youth were all male, older, less school-engaged, and significantly more justice-involved than 2012 youth.

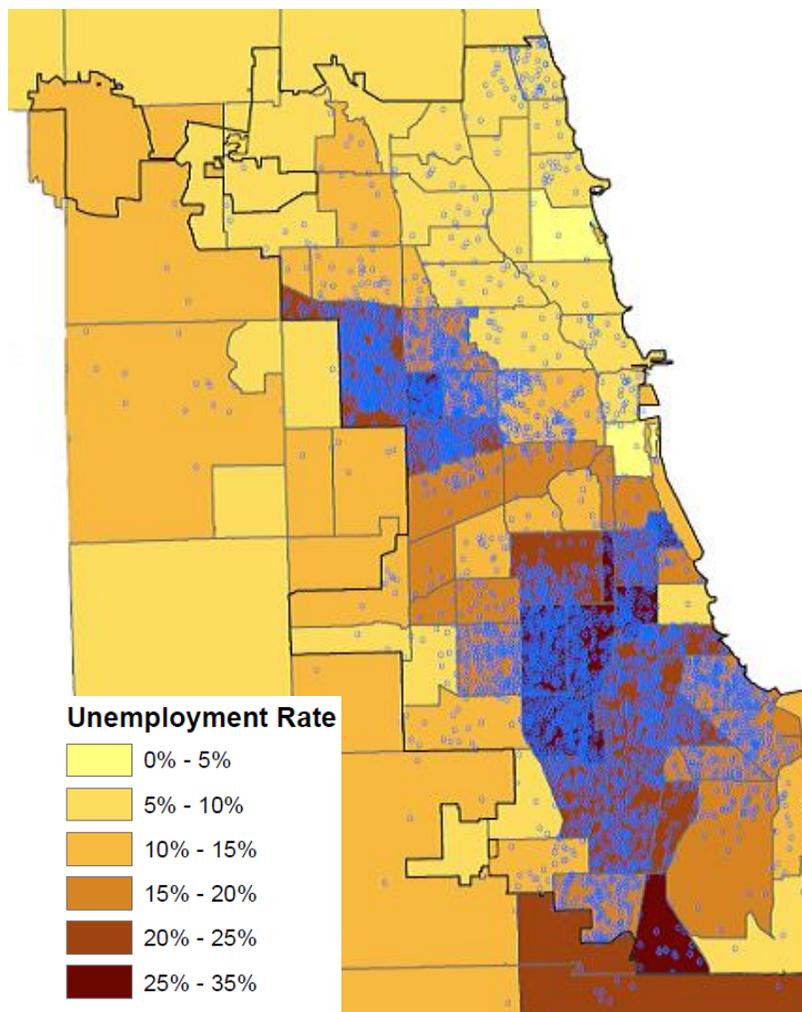
OSC+ Pre-Program Control Group Characteristics, 2012 and 2013

Demographics	2012 Mean	2013 Mean
Age at program start	16.3	18.42
Percent black	96	91
Percent Hispanic	3	7
Percent male	38.5	100
Percent with any baseline arrest	20	47
Percent in school, prior spring	99	51
Days attended in prior school year (if any)*	136.8	122.8

*Chicago Public Schools (CPS) had a 170-day school year in 2012 and a 180-day school year in 2013.

The map below shows that applicants in 2013 were concentrated in areas of high unemployment in Chicago and Cook County; each dot represents an applicant.

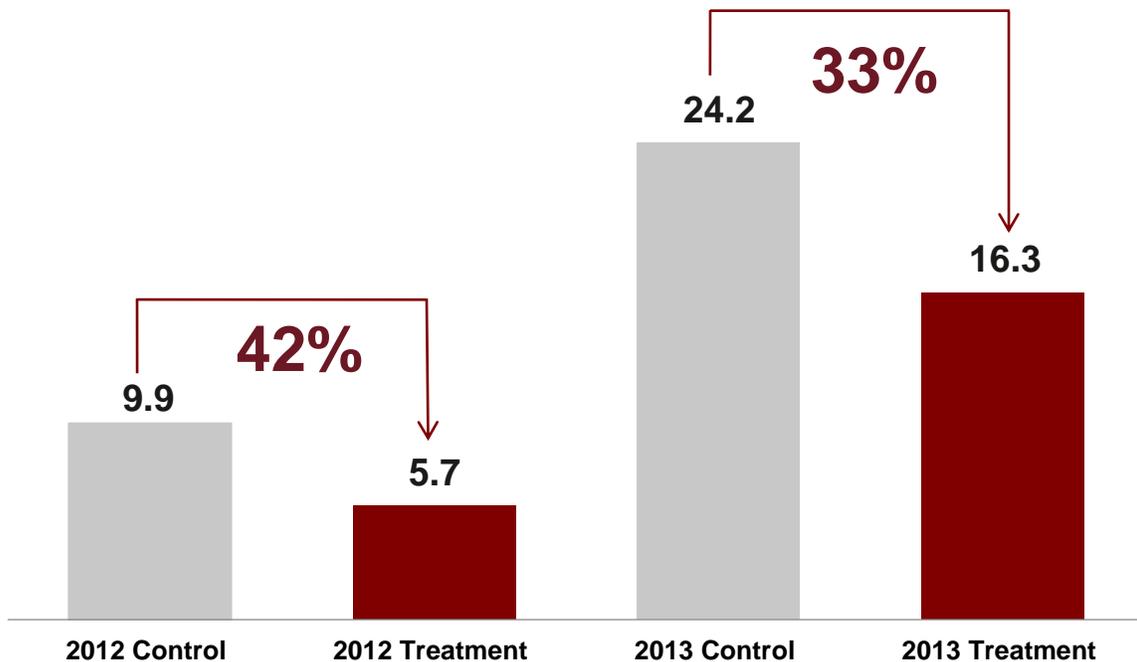
OSC+ 2013 Applicants by Community Area



STUDY RESULTS

The main finding of the new study is that despite the change in the population served, **OSC+ 2013 generated similarly large declines in violent-crime arrests during the first year after random assignment as did OSC+ 2012** (see figure below). The proportional drop was slightly smaller in 2013 than in 2012 (33 versus 42 percent), but with the more criminally active study population, that corresponds to a larger absolute change (7.9 versus 4.2 fewer violent-crime arrests per 100 participants).⁵

2012 and 2013 Violent-Crime Arrest Reduction over 12 Months



Researchers also tracked outcomes beyond 12 months. Pooling the two cohorts together, these longer-term results suggest that the violence gap between participants and non-participants stops growing but does not fade out entirely. After 2–3 years, participants still have approximately 20 percent fewer violent-crime arrests than non-participants. Property crime may also rise during that time, but because violence is so socially costly, the social benefits from the net changes in crime are still likely to outweigh the program’s administrative costs.

More research is needed to determine exactly why violent-crime arrests decline for program youth. However, the study results rule out some candidate explanations:

- The decrease in violent crime arrests is *not* just from incapacitation during the summer. Even ignoring the summer entirely, the decline in violence is still statistically significant. This suggests the shift is not simply a result of the job keeping youth busy.
- There is *no significant impact* on school outcomes, so the decline in arrests does not appear to be driven by youth spending more time in or being more engaged with school.

⁵ To make the results comparable across years, we report the local average treatment effect, or the effect of actually participating for those who choose to comply with their random assignment status.

- There is *no significant change* in post-program formal sector employment for the study sample as a whole. The treatment group does engage in more future work at the agencies that offer OSC+ jobs, suggesting the program helps to develop relationships that are important for future employment. But that difference is not enough to increase overall employment rates. Since labor market effects may develop after our 2- to 3-year follow-up period (allowing youth time to finish school), longer-term follow-up may show different patterns.

WHO BENEFITS MOST FROM SUMMER JOBS?

One subgroup does benefit in terms of formal sector employment and school persistence, but it is not the very disconnected youth whom employment programs typically target. Using a new method from the computer science field of machine learning, researchers looked across subgroups to see if the program had heterogeneous effects on different types of youth. Their approach uses demographic, school, justice, and neighborhood characteristics to predict how particular types of youth will respond to the program.

The results show that the subgroup predicted to have the largest employment improvement did, in fact, show a significant gain in formal sector employment: the quartile predicted to benefit the most shows a 14 percentage point increase in employment rates (about 40 percent). The pattern of other outcomes for this subgroup also suggests *why* the program affects behavior. School persistence also improves among members of this subgroup, consistent with improvements in skills, attitudes, or relationships. But this approach does not reveal significant differences in arrest outcomes between this subgroup and those youth who benefit least. Overall, members of this subgroup actually commit more property crimes, and those with no employment gains also show a decline in violence. It seems that better job prospects do not necessarily translate to less crime, even if the program itself leads to fewer arrests for violent crimes.

The table below describes who these employment benefiter and non-benefiter are (i.e., the characteristics of youth in the top and bottom quartiles of predicted employment effects). The biggest employment benefiter in the two studies were younger, more school-engaged, less likely to have been arrested, more likely to be Hispanic, and living in neighborhoods with slightly lower unemployment rates. In other words, they are not the out-of-school, out-of-work youth typically served by youth employment programs.

OSC+ 2013 Pre-Program Characteristics by OSC+ Predicted Employment Impacts

Characteristic	Benefits least	Benefits most
Age	18.6	16.9
Percent engaged in CPS in prior June	45.5	84.9
Days attended in prior school year (if any)	110.3	139.0
Percent Hispanic	0.8	16.2
Percent ever arrested	58.5	30.6
Neighborhood unemployment rate	17.4	12.3

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS WORK?

OSC+ provides significant social benefits, but not in the places that researchers typically look. Youth employment programs are often considered an opportunity to help disconnected youth to improve their future labor market outcomes. The evidence from the 2012 and 2013 randomized controlled trials of OSC+ suggests the program does generate significant social benefits—in particular a large decline in violent crime—but for different outcomes and populations than most youth employment programs typically target. The consensus in the literature is that only long, expensive interventions can improve human capital in a way that has lasting employment effects. But these two studies suggest that even short summer employment programs can generate important behavioral changes among youth, and their relatively low per-participant costs make summer jobs a powerful, accessible tool for cities seeking to shift outcomes and improve lives.