



# Post Secondary Education (PSE) and Transportation in the Reach Up Program

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Reach Up

PSE helps parents in low-income families obtain two- or four-year college degrees.

## Currently, 105 PSE participants receive:

- Financial grant (same as Reach Up)
- Case management support
- Help with childcare, transportation, and school supplies



## Vermont's PSE Program Results

- 59% of PSE leavers, vs. 45% of Reach Up leavers worked consistently throughout the year after leaving the respective programs
- Median earnings of PSE leavers = \$20,703, while median earnings of Reach Up leavers = \$11,736
- 19% of PSE leavers return to Reach Up, vs. 31% of Reach Up leavers
- PSE leavers were more than twice as likely as Reach Up leavers to earn at least \$20,000/year.

# What is preventing Reach Up participants from participating in PSE?

## Program Rules/Policies

- ★ Eligibility for PSE program did not always align with college admissions
- ★ Unapproved absence from PSE; not allowed to return
- ★ Application process too cumbersome (forms, forms, and more forms)
- Benefit amount too low

## Statutory Limitations

- Challenges specific to 2-parent families:
  1. Statute only allows participation of one parent
  2. Statute requires 2<sup>nd</sup> parent to be working, which often makes family financially ineligible for PSE

## Other Barriers to Participation:

- No High School diploma, or not college-ready (academically)
- Physical/mental health, childcare availability and affordability, transportation, and housing
- Current student loan debt

# “Poverty Interrupted”

*Ideas 42*

*“... The burden of change rests primarily with the individuals and organizations who have the power to design programs and systems in ways that take universal human tendencies into account.”*

- *Cut the costs*
- *Create slack*
- *Reframe and empower*

# Improvements to PSE

## **Cut Costs**

- Reduced three separate forms to one, and cut the number of pages in half
- Simplified application process
- Relaxed documentation requirements
- Simplified process to change major

## **Create Slack**

- Financial eligibility period changed from last calendar year to last thirty day period
- Rolling admissions into PSE
- Leave of absence policy revised to allow second chance

## **Reframe and Empower**

- Participant focus groups
- Non-participating parent in two-parent family no longer required to work with VR

# Transportation

- Nearly 40% of Reach Up participants report that transportation prevents them from getting or keeping a job
- This includes one or more of the following:
  - No license
  - No car or access to adequate public transportation
  - Fines, tickets
  - Needing Impaired Driver Rehabilitation Program

# Transportation – What Reach Up Does:

- Purchase about 60 cars a year for participants through Good News Garage
  - From 2013 to 2015:
    - 135 out of 196 (69%) clients were employed at the time they received the car
    - 89 out of 135 (66%) clients that were employed at the time they received the car are still employed (compared to 45% of RU “leavers” who have income in all four quarters after leaving RU)
- Contract with Capstone Community Action to facilitate Financial Education and Car Workshops
- Provide rides through Ready To Go (Good News Garage)



## What else can be done?

- Fine forgiveness days
- Other pathways for fine forgiveness or reduction
- Streamline processes to pay off fines and tickets
- More options for car ownership