

# A Helping Hand Goes a Long Way: Long-Term Effects of Counselling and Support to Workfare Program Participants

## AUTHORS

Gustavo J. Bobonis\*  
Aneta Bonikowska\*\*  
Philip Oreopoulos\*  
W. Craig Riddell\*\*\*  
Steven P. Ryan\*

## AFFILIATION

\*University of Toronto  
\*\*Statistics Canada  
\*\*\*University of British Columbia

# LONG-TERM GAINS: INTENSIVE SUPPORT FOR WELFARE RECIPIENTS SUBSTANTIALLY ELEVATES EARNINGS FOR 20+ YEARS

NBER WORKING PAPER June 2025



LINK TO PAPER

## Summary

The Canada Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) Plus program offered intensive employment support services to long-term welfare recipients. The program aimed to address economic and psycho-social barriers faced by the poor in finding and retaining desirable employment. Twenty years after the program, researchers linked study participants to their federal tax and employer-employee matched records. The study finds the intensive services treatment led to a 21-27 percent increase in participants' annual earnings over the 20-year period.

## Objective

Study the long-term effects of the Canada Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) Plus program. How can highly intensive support for welfare program participants influence their lives over time and change their socioeconomic trajectories in the long run?

## Methodology

Re-examine a randomized controlled trial of the SSP Plus program, linking study participants (892 single parents receiving social assistance) to their federal tax and employer-employee matched records for up to 20 years after the random assignment. In addition, a volunteer sample of program participants attended focus group discussions.

## Results

- Participants increased full-time employment over the first decade post-intervention, had greater job retention in higher-paying firms, and improved their non-cognitive skills.
- The intensive treatment group had a 21-27% increase in participants' annual earnings over the 20-year period.
- The improved economic trajectories of program participants was mirrored by a 5 to 11 percentage point decrease in their receipt of cash welfare over the first decade after the random assignment.

**21-27%**

increase in participants' annual earnings, mirrored by

**5-11**

percentage point decrease in receipt of social assistance.

