

# ESPRI

Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

## Final Report to the Community

SEPTEMBER 2021



# 2016-2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## II. IMPACT DASHBOARD

## III. ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

1. Collaboration is Critical
2. Flexible Funding
3. The Critical role of Coaches, Mentors, and Authentically Engaged Support
4. The Holistic Approach, including Understanding Readiness to Change
5. Intensity of Engagements and Number of Referrals
6. Applied Improvement Science
7. Recruitment Processes
8. Policy Implications

## IV. IMPACT OF COVID

## V. ANALYSIS

## VI. CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS AND KEY RECOMENDATIONS

## VII. NOTES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## VIII. APENDICIES: PROGRAM SUMMARIES

**2016**

City of Jamestown selected as one of 16 localities across NYS to receive \$1 million ESPRI grant

**2017**

Phase 1 (Planning) Begins. Formation of ESPRI Taskforce and Planning Process, including Community Needs Assessment and Community Improvement Workshops

**OCTOBER 2017**

Agencies submit proposals for funding and Taskforce selects seven projects

**APRIL 2018**

Phase 2 (Implementation) Begins. ESPRI Implementation funds are received. Projects begin activities

**JUNE 2019**

UWSCC issues RFP for additional "Bridge Funding" for ESPRI agencies. \$118,288 in funds provided to 4 of 7 agencies.

**DECEMBER 2019**

An additional \$180,195 in ESPRI funds awarded to City of Jamestown

**MARCH 2020**

Impact of COVID

**JANUARY 2021 - JUNE 2021**

Most ESPRI agencies exhaust NYS funds.

**SEPTEMBER 2021**

ESPRI grant contract ends

This report was written, edited and prepared by Amy Rohler, Kate Ebersole (KEE Concepts), and Lindsey Goold



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2016, United Way of Southern Chautauqua County (UWSCC) was selected as the lead agency for the City of Jamestown's Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative (ESPRI). With the Mayor's office, UWSCC convened a Taskforce of key stakeholders in the community, including those with lived experience in poverty. Over the course of a year during Phase I of the grant, the Taskforce examined demographics, labor statistics, held community conversations and listening sessions, and hosted a series of Community Improvement workshops for potential applicants for funding. We prepared a Community Needs Assessment. In August 2017, UWSCC and the ESPRI Taskforce released a Request for Proposal for transformational projects, ones that showed innovation and collaboration. The strategic aim of the ESPRI funding was as follows: to reduce the number of ALICE families (Asset-Limited, Income Constrained Employed) in the city of Jamestown by 160 (or 2%) by 2027 and increase the labor participation rate for 25–64-year-old by 5%.

The focus of the funding was workforce development, and all applicants were asked to apply under one of the following primary drivers:

- Educational Preparation for Employment
- Secure and Retain Employment
- Family and Community Support
- Support for Employers

Agencies were encouraged in the RFP process to collaborate and cultivate relationships with each other. Thirteen agencies applied and small teams of Taskforce members met in October 2017 to make funding decisions. The following proposals were funded, and in May 2018 – the City of Jamestown Phase II ESPRI projects were approved by New York State and began delivering services to Jamestown residents in poverty:

- Chautauqua Adult Day Services (CADS)
- Jamestown Community Learning Council (JCLC)
- Chautauqua Works (CW)
- Mental Health Association (MHA)
- Community Helping Hands (CHH)
- The Resource Center (TRC)
- Jamestown Community College (JCC)
- YWCA

The programs utilized a shared database (Charity Tracker) that allowed them to share information with each other about participant's demographic information, level of assistance provided and individual employment or educational goals. Agencies were required to meet together a monthly basis and to submit quarterly reports that provided updates on their metrics and narrative summaries of their programs, including challenges and changes they were making to the programs. Since the beginning, programs were encouraged to adapt a PDSA approach ("plan, do, study, act") so they were making continual improvements and adjustments to design and delivery of services in real time. This encouraged an innovation culture and reinforced the importance of learning from each other as to best practices around issues like recruitment and engagement with participants, data collection, and policies and procedures for providing emergency assistance and incentives (flexible funding). It also prepared agencies to adeptly handle the disruption and crisis of COVID-19.

## BEST PRACTICES

- AIM & DRIVER planning
- PDSA Methodology
- Bridges Out of Poverty Training
- Flexible Funding
- Include Frontline staff in collaborative meetings
- Strategically include employers, government agencies and other service providers in some collaborative meetings
- Evaluate recruitment and outreach strategies

## STRATEGIC ESPRI ACTIONS

- Hub Organization to drive and coordinate the work, including building a collaboration culture among agencies (collective impact model)
- Shared Reporting and Client Management Platform
- Applied Improvement Science
- Long term client relationships

## RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

- Continue convening poverty reduction taskforce
- Identify hub organization to coordinate
- Address the Benefits Cliff
- Plan additional community improvement workshops for non-profits

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since May 2018, the overall collective impact of ESPRI programs is as follows. \*

- 466 unduplicated households in the City of Jamestown have been impacted. 53% of individuals impacted are female. 19% are Hispanic. 62% are working age adults, ages 26-64. The average cost per household served was \$2,533.
- 214 individuals secured employment
- 101 individuals have enrolled in education, certification and training programs
- 360 individuals engaged with a coach, mentor or support staff identifying goals and steps to move them out of poverty or ALICE.
- \$69,104 in emergency assistance to 205 households, primarily for barriers related to childcare, transportation and housing.
- 14 local employers whose “at risk” employees are supported by ESPRI programs
- 156 “at risk” employees who retained their employment

It should be noted that the above summary is restricted to City of Jamestown residents, as required by the ESPRI Grant; however, ESPRI programs inevitably ended up serving beyond the 14701 zip code. When we include all participants, the total number of unduplicated households increases to 626. The average cost per household served (regardless of zip code) is only \$1,885.

There were significant challenges in this initiative, some of which were expected and policy related (e.g., the Benefits Cliff) and some of which could not have been imagined during the planning phase (e.g., the impact of COVID-19). Other challenges included:

- The inability to effectively track participants, especially in the long term, due changes in cell phones contact information (Facebook messaging was a more consistent way to communicate with someone!)
- Consistently tracking employee retention
- Staff turnover (at both the leadership and program staff levels)
- Consistent data collection
- The natural delay in an agency's ability to operationalize innovative practices and new data collection systems. Getting new programs started and transforming organizational culture simply takes time.

With one exception (Chautauqua Adult Day Services, which ended their program early in February 2019 due to staffing issues), all the programs continue to deliver their services to this day—in some form—in spite of completely expending their NYS grant funds and in spite of the disruption of COVID-19. In June 2019, United Way issued an RFP for “Bridge Funding” for ESPRI agencies to apply for additional funding to “bridge” them to additional sources of funding, once their ESPRI funds were exhausted. With support from the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation and the Lenna Foundation, the following agencies received additional bridge funding from United Way to continue their programs: JCLC, MHA, TRC and YWCA.

**\$69,104** in emergency assistance to 205 households, primarily for barriers related to childcare, transportation and housing.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A brief summary of each individual's program goals and impact are included in the table below. Each agency was required to create an AIM & DRIVER diagram that provided a roadmap for accomplishing their goals. More detailed information is available in the appendices section at the end of this report:

AGENCY & PROGRAM NAME	TOTAL BUDGET NYS & Bridge	ORIGINAL AIM & DRIVER + FINAL OUTCOMES	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS SERVED
CADS	\$28,795	<b>AIM: 10 individuals employed in health care field</b> 10 completed training program 6 employed in health care field	10
CW "SUCCESS"	\$139,129	<b>AIM: 65 students are "work ready"</b> 47 students completed paid work experiences 75 participated in employability skills sessions	91
CHH "Grit to Greater"	\$130,639	<b>AIM: 50 heads of household secure employment</b> 39 secured employment 14 enrolled in educational programs	162
JCC "SPREE"	\$160,568	<b>AIM: 50 single parents will obtain a credential</b> 20 Jamestown students graduated 63 students graduated if outside 14701 zip code	123 Jmst 375 overall
JCLC "PAT PLUS"	\$94,427 \$14,064 Bridge	<b>AIM: 15 teen mothers enrolled in PAT and transition to employment and/or education</b> 22 teens enrolled in PAT 17 secured employment 15 enrolled in educational programs	22 teen moms 52 incl household
MHA "OPEN"	\$150,310 \$28,822 Bridge	<b>AIM: 100 individuals secure employment</b> 113 individuals secured employment 34 enrolled in educational programs	227
TRC "SAFER"	\$193,932 \$43,995 Bridge	<b>AIM: Improve employee retention for 16 employers and 110 "at risk" employees retain employment;</b> 14 employers 156 employees retained employment	160
YWCA "W2W Mentoring"	\$90,795 \$21,408 Bridge	<b>AIM: 26 Women Participating in W2W Mentoring Program</b> 25 matches 13 secured employment 9 enrolled in educational programs	25 women 61 incl household

# 214

individuals secured employment



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall, the most significant impact of ESPRI has been in providing insight and recommendations to the non-profit and government sectors in best practices in reducing poverty, fostering collaboration and engaging ALICE households and households in poverty. The following report provides a summary of lessons learned, a high-level analysis of the entire four-year project, recommendations to various sectors involved in poverty reduction (government, philanthropy, employers and service providers), and suggestions for immediate next steps as our community moves forward in this endeavor.

A special thanks to the City of Jamestown, in particular former Mayor Sam Teresi and current Mayor Eddie Sundquist for their support in this initiative. We would also be remiss not to thank the many individuals who volunteered on the Taskforce, which was cross-sector and represented many of the organizations critical in any poverty reduction initiative. And, of course, the ESPRI agencies that have passionately dedicated themselves to assisting their participants, even in the midst of a global pandemic and unforeseen challenges.

In total, the City of Jamestown was awarded \$1,180,195 to plan, implement and evaluate innovative programs aimed at reducing poverty. Due to many factors, it may be impossible to truly evaluate whether we were successful in our original goal of reducing the number of ALICE families in the city of Jamestown. What we can substantively say is that many households in the City of Jamestown were impacted positively by ESPRI and, in the words of one of our local employers and ESPRI Taskforce members, "the goal was never to end poverty, but to work at learning better how to reduce it. I think we've accomplished that." United Way of Southern Chautauqua County has been proud to administer the ESPRI grant on behalf of the City of Jamestown and to work with so many dedicated members of this community.

Sincerely,



Amy Rohler, Executive Director  
United Way of Southern Chautauqua County.



*"The goal was never to end poverty, but to work at learning better how to reduce it. I think we've accomplished that."*

**- ESPRI Taskforce Member**

**Ultimate Goal:** To improve the quality of life in the City of Jamestown by reducing poverty and increasing self-sufficiency through Workforce Development.

**Household Changes to Strive For:** By 2027 decrease the number of ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Families by 160.

**Strategy:** Implement 7 Collaborative & Innovative Projects that fall within four Primary Outcomes

- Educational Support for Employment
- Community & Family Support for Employment
- Securing and Retaining Employment
- Support for Employers

**IMPACT ON POVERTY IN 4.5 YEARS**

**\$1,180,195 INVESTED**

**May 2018-September 2021**

<p>Individuals Secured Employment:</p> <p><b>214</b></p>	<p>Individuals Enrolled in Education/Certification Training Programs:</p> <p><b>101</b></p>	<p>Individuals Engaged with a Coach, Mentor or Support</p> <p><b>360</b></p> <p>so they could secure &amp; retain employment or education. 31% have achieved their identified goals</p>
<p>City of Jamestown Households Served:</p> <p><b>466</b></p> <p>320 individuals impacted are working age adults (26-64)                      103 are young adults (19-25)                      53% are Female                      190% are Hispanic                      8% are African American</p>	<p>Emergency Assistance</p> <p><b>\$69,104</b></p> <p>\$17,390 in childcare assistance                      \$18,931 in transportation assistance                      \$11,987 in housing assistance</p> <p>Other assistance included cell phone minutes, books for school, boots/clothing for work</p>	<p>Barriers Overcome</p> <p><b>420</b></p> <p>205 households received financial assistance to overcome barriers like minor car repair, rental assistance, childcare scholarships, cell phone minutes keeping them <b>employed</b></p>
<p>Number of Local Employers with ESPRI supported employees:</p> <p><b>14</b></p>	<p>At Risk Employees Who Retained Employment:</p> <p><b>156</b></p> <p>Working with a Success Coach. ESPRI supported Employers experienced a decrease in turnover.</p>	<p>Average Cost Per Household Served</p> <p><b>\$2,533</b></p> <p>Resulting for many households in an increase in household income and reduction of government benefits.</p>

# DATA BREAKDOWN (9/12/21): Charity Tracker\*

Total City of Jamestown Households Engaged: 466

Total Individuals Impacted: 532

## AGE

• Working Age Adults (26-64) .....	329
• Young Adults (19-25) .....	103
• Older Children (7-18).....	38
• Younger Children (0-6).....	22
• Seniors (65+) .....	4
• Unknown.....	36

## GENDER

• Female.....	281
• Male.....	248
• Unknown/Prefer Not to Identify.....	3

## ETHNICITY

• Caucasian.....	358
• Hispanic.....	106
• African American.....	42
• Native American.....	8
• Mixed.....	19
• Other/Prefer Not to Answer.....	16

**Total Households with Outcomes (Goals) Identified.....360**

### 31% are close to achieving identified goals

Community & Family Support – **151 goals** related to addressing barriers like transportation, childcare, housing and mental health / substance use disorders.

Employment – **261 goals** related to employment

• 0-20% complete .....	99
• 21-40% complete .....	53
• 41-60% complete .....	39
• 61-80% complete .....	47
• 81-100% complete .....	115

**TOTAL Emergency Assistance Provided: \$69,103.57 (updated quarterly as of 6/30/21)**

• Childcare.....	\$16,390.00
• Transportation.....	\$18,931.08
• Housing/Utilities.....	\$11,986.57
• Cell Phone.....	\$1,123.49
• Clothing/Hygiene.....	\$4,009.09
• Incentives (Giftcards).....	\$4,215.00
• Misc (tuition, books, school supplies,, .....	\$12,448.34



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 1. Collaboration is Critical

One of the requirements of the ESPRI project was that agencies collaborate with each other, but we found that it took time, structure and intentionality to build a culture of authentic collaboration. Networking, coordination and cooperation were encouraged and the agencies were helped in their efforts through the use of a shared database (Charity Tracker), monthly meetings of all ESPRI agencies during which tools for collaboration, data, and best practices were shared, and time was devoted to relationship building through joint training and information sharing. The agencies were asked to report on the number of referrals they used for each client and this was analyzed to determine the impact on the goals of ESPRI of greater collaboration between agencies. Agencies recognized that ESPRI increased their understanding of other agencies' services and programs and taught them the importance of working collaboratively with other local agencies.

We consider one of the greatest collateral benefits of the ESPRI initiative was the increased awareness of both the importance of collaboration and the different and unique ways of collaborating that the ESPRI agencies developed. As time went on, the agencies became more open to relationships that didn't fit the usual model of collaboration for their agency while initial thoughts on collaboration weren't always the ones that ended up being the most effective. Sometimes the "natural partners" identified at the outset did not ultimately end up being the partnerships that yielded the best outcomes; while unlikely partnerships—only achieved through several months of meetings or shared information—resulted in more effective and innovative services.

Before ESPRI we considered ourselves as collaborating with other community agencies. However, with ESPRI we have experienced collaboration in a whole new way at a much deeper level. We now have a better understanding of what true collaboration is, and are taking a much more active part in Jamestown's community network. We have much more knowledge of services in our area that would not have otherwise become familiar with, and are much more familiar with how to effectively navigate those services. We are partnering with agencies on community projects because we know each other through ESPRI. We now have several "go to people" at local organizations and can connect people quickly.

- One ESPRI Agency's Perspective

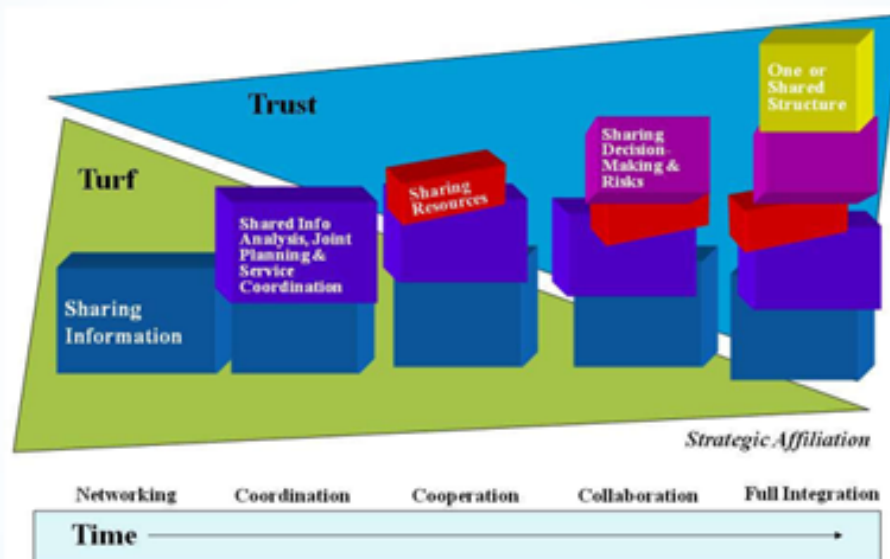
# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

The ESPRI agencies went beyond shared information and were interacting with each other in the realm of joint planning and service coordination for clients. The relationship between agencies as a result of the collaboration requirement resulted in greater trust between agencies along with the increased communication and joint planning, and in time could lead to more collaborative activities such as greater shared decision making and risk. \*\*

The ESPRI agencies also found that collaboration means more than just working at the top levels of an organization with another organization. Collaboration between agencies could also include collaboration between all levels of two agencies including front line workers. One of the interesting aspects of ESPRI was that the monthly meetings were not just the Executive Directors or Program Directors from each agency, they also included the front-line workers who were interacting directly with the clients for that agency. This allowed for a greater range of dialogue and understanding between agencies, and within agencies, as several levels, with each learning about both the challenges and success of their own and the others. Best practices could be shared and, at times, meeting-time was spent brainstorming solutions to another agency's challenges.

True collaboration took time to develop and occurred on individual, organizational and cross-sector levels. It is recommended that future initiatives involving different agencies that work with people in poverty include deliberate forms of collaboration between agencies and that these efforts are supported by ongoing meetings to share best practices, innovations and successes.

## Collaboration Continuum



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 2. Flexible Funding

The concept of flexible funding became one of the most effective tools in helping people secure and retain employment. Most of the programs had flexible funds available as part of their strategy for reducing poverty, and over time these became a critically important piece of the support required to help people overcome daily barriers to either securing or retaining employment. Flexible funds were used for a wide array of needed items, such as paying for car repairs, buying tires, fees for licenses or other needed documents, and other often inexpensive and yet critically important costs that people living in poverty do not always have the resources to cover. Not only did flexible funding help participants overcome relatively small barriers, but it also helped them to feel supported—this was critical to individual success. Flexible funding did not need to be large amounts, but sometimes just a small amount of assistance or small incentive made a big difference. It provided a short-term solution to give time to develop a long-term plan. What was equally important was that the flexible funding was delivered through the mechanism of a trusted agency (with experience and knowledge of challenges of working with households in poverty) and usually within a mentoring/coaching relationship. The use of flexible funds was both strategic and surgical. There was also a common process for requesting funds, universally agreed upon limits on the amounts that could be requested and documentation used universally with all ESPRI programs.

In a post-ESPRI Appreciative Inquiry exercise with all ESPRI agencies, there was a consensus that flexible funding is a critically important factor in making working with people in poverty more effective. As part of the shared data portion of ESPRI, the United Way tracked and documented the use of flexible funds to demonstrate this effectiveness. It is highly recommended that future anti-poverty initiatives funding streams allow for a portion of the funds to be used specifically for flexible funds for clients and that this money be tracked to determine the most common challenges of the population being served and to help design future interventions that address the real-life barriers faced by people in poverty.

The Resource Center SAFER program supported one woman who could not afford the appropriate uniforms that were required of her to work. She also had a barrier with transportation. She has a degenerative disability and is determined to work as long as she is able. In the winter, walking is not an option and transportation on the weekends was too costly. Her Success Coach was able to provide her with some emergency assistance funding for uniforms and to get her transportation while they worked on a sustainable plan. Additionally, due to the woman's medical condition she was struggling being on her feet for long periods of time and we were able to get her high-quality shoes that allowed her to continue working full shifts. She could not afford the extra money on something as simple as good footwear. In working with her on budgeting, the Coach identified that if she worked one extra day a week, she could afford the transportation. The Coach helped facilitate this with her HR department and she was able to get another day added. Without the support of the Success Coach, she was unable to figure out that 1 extra shift would allow her to be able to pay for her transportation.

- The Resource Center

# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 3. The Critical Role of Coaches, Mentors and Authentically Engaged Support

Whether you call it a mentor, a peer recovery coach, a success coach, achievement coach or employment coach (and all of these various names were used by different ESPRI programs) – this key relationship was critical when it came to participant success. This often involved multiple touchpoints through various mechanisms and was individualized to a person’s specific needs. Building trust and relationships with participants took time. The mentor/coach often helped participants navigate complex systems or identify other programs/services that could provide assistance. It was also important for these staff to learn to meet people where they were at (sometimes literally, in the case of meeting someone at their worksite!). For anyone who has worked in the health and human services field, this “lesson learned” is most likely not anything new or particularly innovative. However, the ESPRI innovation was to combine that trusted relationship with the focus on collaboration and the flexible funding tool. These coaches were part of the monthly meetings, and so they also developed relationships with each other—facilitating more authentic “warm hand-offs.”

A SAFER Success Coach supported a participant who had ambitions of going to nursing school which would provide him the opportunity to get out of poverty. He had previously incurred a significant amount of student debt from several years ago, preventing him from enrolling in school. The Success Coach was working with him on a plan to pay it off and discovered that because he grew up in foster care, he could have been eligible for additional aid that no one in any financial aid office had ever shared with him. He has now paid off his debt, and his Coach just assisted him in applying for the subsidy he is eligible for. Without the coach helping him research and assist with budgeting skills, he never would have learned of this subsidy toward his future education and would be less likely to follow through with the application. He has now applied to nursing school while he continues working in a nursing home and is now on his way to living a life out of poverty.

- The Resource Center

**466** Unduplicated households in the City of Jamestown have been impacted. 53% of individuals impacted are female. 19% are Hispanic. 62% are working age adults, ages 26-64.





# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 4. The Holistic Approach, Including Understanding Readiness to Change

Many of the clients living in poverty who were served through the ESPRI program have multiple challenges in their lives. Attempting to address one challenge, such as employment, without taking into consideration all aspects of that client's life was not always successful. ESPRI agencies needed to be able to understand and work with these clients to help them through many life challenges in order to meet the ESPRI goal of securing and/or retaining employment or education. Some of these challenges included transportation issues, lack of healthy and supportive home environments, childcare, and health issues. ESPRI agencies found that they needed to work with their clients holistically on their whole lives, not just one aspect of their lives. Knowing the clients and understanding all of their challenges is critical to success in an anti-poverty initiative. This concept also aligns with the idea of the importance of relationship building. At the root of much of this work is the relationship that the agency builds with the client. Relationships are built on shared stories leading to understanding and compassion, and also the realization that people in poverty or ALICE families may have a different perspective on their lives and challenges, and it is imperative to understand their perspective in order to truly help them succeed.

Working holistically with their clients also provided the ESPRI agencies with insight into how ready that client was to really change their life circumstances. One of the areas that was studied as a result of ESPRI activities was the idea of the readiness to change. At the monthly meetings we held discussions on how to determine the signs that a client was ready to change their lives, thus making them better candidates to work with. As with the level of engagement and referral study, it was found that when a client is ready to change, the level of engagement and/or referrals did not need to be as intense as when an agency was trying to work with someone resistant to change.

**“When a client recognizes that they need to change their situation rather than blaming their situation, they generally are going to be more open to changing those aspects of their lives that are holding them back.”**

**- Mental Health Association**

The determination of readiness to change was done intuitively by the front-line people working in the field, and there are assessment tools for measuring the readiness to change. Future anti-poverty initiatives could make use of readiness-to-change assessments but the intuitive realization about someone's readiness to change was many times made based on the relationship with that person. The agencies talked about the importance of trust as a means to get to know someone well enough to be able to ascertain if they were ready to change. Building trusting relationships was discussed and practiced extensively in the community health improvement workshops, which resulted in these relationship building skills being used with both clients and with other agencies to improve collaboration. Trust is built by sharing stories and connecting on an emotional level, with the understanding of the other person then creating a level of compassion for their situation.

# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

This readiness to change could also be applied to the agencies within the ESPRI project. Through the encouragement to be innovative and collaborative and to build relationships with other ESPRI organizations, these agencies developed new partnerships, learned of services they were not aware of before and generally embraced different ways to be effective in their delivery of services to their ESPRI clients.

“E” came to CHH looking to learn and practice her English. She was very limited in English and felt that she would be able to get a better job speaking both English and Spanish. We were able to get her signed up for BOCES classes located in the same building as CHH and she became friends with other volunteers at CHH in these classes. She soon came to enjoy the “family” style environment that was here she joined us every day. She came from a domestic violence situation in Puerto Rico and escaped that, but was able to expand her network through the our ESPRI program. She attended and graduated our Grit to Great workshop and was able to get a job—her first job was working with senior citizens. Grit workshop helped her to learn more self awareness and understand her strengths. She now works works full time as an assistant working with special education kids at school at Jamestown Public Schools. She still continues to be part of CHH by volunteering.

- Community Helping Hands

360

Individuals engaged with a coach, mentor or support staff identifying goals and steps to move them out of poverty or ALICE.



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 5. Intensity of Engagements and Number of Referrals

Using the data collected in Charity Tracker and interviews with each agency, we asked agencies about intensity of the engagement with each client and whether the number of referrals received by clients impacted their level of success. The numbers were pulled together and are demonstrated graphically below.

In essence, it was found that the most successful combination of engagement and referrals was not the most intense, but more the medium (rated by level of engagement from 1 – 5 and number of referrals from 1 – 5). 156 Clients received a medium level intensity of engagement and approximately 3 referrals, and this was the most successful group in terms of securing employment (70%) and retaining employment (65%).

Interestingly, when the level of engagement went up, this did not necessarily indicate a greater level of potential success for that client. It was felt by the agencies that when a client did require a higher level of engagement, this indicated a client with greater needs to overcome the barriers in their lives and it required more time and effort on the part of the agency to help them address those barriers. Of the 36 clients with the highest level of engagement and referral, 63% obtained employment while 57% retained employment. These numbers are positive, but the amount of time and effort it took to get these clients into jobs and keeping those jobs should be taken into consideration when designing anti-poverty programs.

Level of Engagement and Referrals Comparison



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 6. Applied Improvement Science

At the onset of the ESPRI project, the United Way and Sheldon Foundation came together to sponsor a series of workshops on community health improvement topics for all of the non-profits interested in applying for ESPRI funding. The intention was to give all potential ESPRI agencies some background in community health improvement methods.

The curriculum was developed by local improvement advisor Kate Ebersole based on her extensive training in improvement science techniques through two Robert Wood Johnson supported initiatives in WNY. The basic premise was that doing work in the community requires measurement, but the design of the measurement system has to take into account that agencies are working with people, not systems, and that agencies working in this space need to have flexibility along with the ability to track and measure the impact of their programs.

The tools presented during the workshops included measurement tools such as Aim and Driver diagrams, PDSA (plan, do, study, act) cycles and the idea of permission to FAIL (First Attempt in Learning). Additionally, each session included information and exercises on how to engage with community members. The sharing of thoughts and ideas in small groups with people from different agencies jumpstarted the relationship development process that later supported the deeper level of trust and collaboration between ESPRI agencies.

Using PDSA cycles was called out specifically by the agencies as a tool that helped them become more flexible and able to meet changing needs. The essence of a plan, do, study, act cycle is the idea that all interventions and activities need to be planned and then tracked. If they work, do more of those but if they don't work, then try something different. Failure was encouraged as a sign of innovation and this freed up the agencies to try innovative methods of recruitment and client engagement. Agencies were required to report quarterly (and give specific examples) on the PDSA cycles they had attempted and their outcomes.

“We have changed the way we discuss and gather our data. The reports generated by Charity Tracker are good, but they aren't very easy for quickly noticing when a milestone is going to hit, or finding tracking data regarding education. We took some of the reports and exported them to an excel spreadsheet for internal use which is updated regularly with color indicators as to who has gained employment, or retained for 90 days.

- Mental Health Association



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

It was also important that the ESPRI administering agency, the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, did not just sponsor the workshops, they also attended the workshops so they were also learning the measurement science and client engagement tools and methods alongside the future ESPRI agencies. This deepened the relationship between the administering entity and the ESPRI agencies, and allowed the United Way to also apply measurement science tools in their oversight of the program, including using PDSA cycles to support innovation and flexibility in their overall management of the ESPRI initiative.

If we look at the life of the ESPRI project from its inception, we can see that the entire project was a PDSA cycle in action. The initial thoughts and plans for ESPRI laid the groundwork, but as the United Way and the ESPRI agencies worked together, it was recognized what was working well and where there were needed changes. Some changes that were made--based on seeing what was working and what wasn't--include: additional training for the agencies, support for innovations, different reporting requirements in terms of the quarterly reports and a constantly evolving agenda for the monthly ESPRI agency meetings.

The agencies themselves saw the value of these workshops and it is recommended that measurement science, client engagement and methods of collaboration be taught to agencies working together in anti-poverty initiatives in the future.

“We really thought through the secondary driver, which addressed unsubsidized employment at 30+ hours per week. We did not feel that this was an appropriate or realistic goal for most of our participants as they are in school and should be focusing on staying in school. This is when we decided that a more appropriate goal was to focus on the participant’s grades and positive school attendance as well as work experience attendance. Focusing on participant’s attendance at school and work can be tied in with the work readiness skill that is constantly described as a barrier to successful employment and retention by area businesses. By addressing a major issue in work readiness (attendance) and changing our secondary driver, we have started to see an increase in the participants’ attendance at the worksite and in school.”

- Chautauqua Works

# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 7. Recruitment Processes Changed with Time

All of the agencies started out with some standard practice for recruitment, and through the use of PDSA cycles and measurement, they found new and innovative ways to increase both recruitment and engagement.

Some of the lessons learned through this process were that the participants themselves were the best recruiting tool, and that word of mouth through other agencies really helped increase the success of recruitment efforts. Agencies also felt that using online tools helped streamline recruitment, and that this innovation in turn really helped the agencies continue to be successful through the COVID crisis.

As part of the collaboration between agencies, the idea of one program being a feeder program to another ESPRI program became another important recruiting tool. For example, a client that was in the PAT Plus program might have also needed some kind of substance use support and so referring them into the MHA Peer Program allowed them to be more successful both in their own program and then also as a client in the MHA program.

For the programs working on employee retention, they found that recruitment worked much better when they were within the employer system rather than working completely externally to those organizations, and the success of the employee retention programs was many times due to the relationships built with employers who allowed the ESPRI agency to work within their system.

One program success experienced to date is the application and integration of the technology services available at JCC that will serve to assist SPREE outreach efforts to better identify, enroll and support our single parent students. For example, a dedicated email account is being created that more efficiently and effectively identifies all single parent students at JCC currently enrolled and not enrolled in the SPREE program. Through this dedicated program account, the project navigator will have the means to not only engage with students, but also track their communications and progress. In addition, students will be provided with the tools to electronically submit necessary intake forms/information, and schedule follow-up and face-to-face appointments with the Project Navigator and future Achievement Coach for personalized program support.

- Jamestown Community College

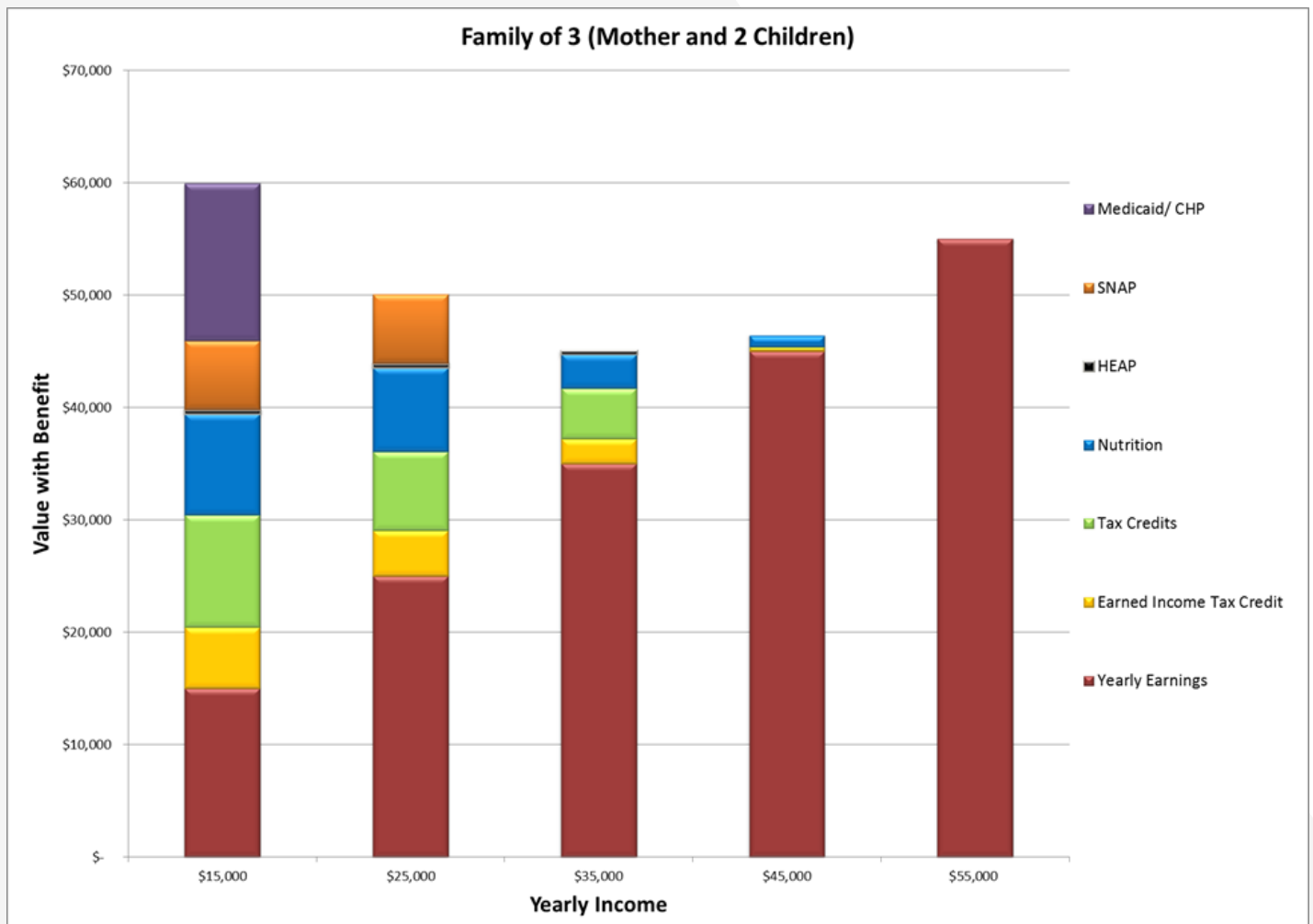
# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

## 8. Policy Implications

Overall, there were a number of different ways in which the ESPRI project raised awareness of policy issues that impact people living in poverty. Three major systemic issues emerged as having the most impact as to why households continued to remain in poverty. These included the benefits cliff, the complexity of navigating the system of services, and inherent issues of injustice and inequitable access.

One of the ways that ESPRI agencies aided their participants was in helping them to navigate the system of supports available to them. This often entailed a great deal of learning on the staff side; in fact, multiple quarterly reports from agencies included sections on all the things they were learning in the process, including: services and programs they had not known were available; hidden fees and costs (e.g., the cost of acquiring a birth certificate or a driver's license); difficulties in the requirements to recertify for government benefits, and many more. There are a myriad of programs, services and a supports available in Chautauqua County (through non-profits, community action agencies and government programs) but the complexity of these systems and the difficulty in navigating them presents a significant barrier. If case managers, care coordinators and coaches struggle to remain knowledgeable about the "system" of services, how much more for individuals in poverty or ALICE families to do so?

Another major policy challenge is the "benefits cliff," which is that point in which someone who receives government benefits starts making enough money by being employed that it takes them out of their eligibility for benefits, but which is not enough to make up for that loss of benefits. The impact is that people often decide not to take on full time work, or would quit a job if asked to put in more hours that would then reduce their benefits.



# ESPRI LESSONS LEARNED

The two most common benefits that have a “cliff” effect occur with childcare and healthcare. As a result, working at a low-wage job (especially a part time job with inconsistent hours) can create a situation where a household is worse off in terms of total assets and resources than not working. Many ESPRI participants secured employment, often working part time in which hours changed on a weekly basis or were not guaranteed. This resulted in some weeks where they qualified for child-care subsidies and some weeks in which they did not. This was a difficult challenge to navigate for participants themselves, their coaches and the child care facilities. \*\*\*

“C abruptly lost her government benefits due to increased hours and wages earned in her job. While it was sometimes difficult to be on assistance, the basic needs of her family were being met. With assistance in place, C. received childcare subsidies to bring her kids to a reputable, loving, childcare center while she worked. However, with decreased benefits due to an increase in her wages, she is now not able to afford childcare. She didn’t quite make enough to get by without any help, but she still wanted to work to better herself. Even with her strong work ethic, no matter how hard she tried, she was unable to get ahead. The effects continue to snowball and have an impact on every aspect of her family’s life.”

- **Jamestown Community Learning Council**

One solution to both the system complexity and the benefits cliff issue would be to create Benefits Transitions Navigators—frontline workers with information about supports available to help members of the community who are going through benefits cliff to connect with services. This was, in effect, what the SAFER Success Coaches did with individuals already working who often experienced barriers related to both systemic issues. The fact that they were embedded within the employer made participants who were working more easily able to access services and supports.

“I have countless examples of people not being able to navigate the complex systems that can provide relief or assistance to families. When we are working with people who have so many obstacles and challenges in their life, it can seem impossible for them to figure out the supports. So many people are caught up in the struggles they are facing they cannot think about or focus on their future planning that will ultimately help change their situations. They are simply working for tomorrow.”

- **The Resource Center**



# IMPACT OF COVID

The impact of COVID-19 cannot be underestimated and must be included in any high-level summary. Individuals who had been employed through ESPRI programs found themselves unemployed as many businesses shut down; educational programs paused or shifted to virtual; participants were difficult to reach during certain periods of the last 18 months; the long-term data now felt compromised. Below is a summary of the effect of COVID on ESPRI programs:

- Some programs furloughed staff initially or for a temporary amount of time. Many turned their attention to other programs or sources of funding focused on meeting emergency and basic needs.
- Virtual / Electronic means of connecting, e.g., coaching/mentoring/support happened through phone calls and texts. Trainings were held via Zoom. There was great difficulty in overcoming barriers and providing support electronically (e.g., getting a driver's license now more challenging for both participant and staff).
- Participants and Staff experienced increase in mental health issues, isolation challenges, time constraints, childcare and school-aged complexities involving remote learning. Internet and technology access were difficult barriers.
- The economic development and workforce development landscape changed, particularly with employers. In a matter of a week, it radically changed from the challenge of finding qualified workers to many unemployed – especially in the early days of COVID – which impacted many ESPRI programs. In COVID recovery, the challenge of finding both skilled and unskilled works has returned, and intensified.

The ultimate goal of ESPRI – to reduce ALICE households – has been critically impacted by the event of COVID, as many households will likely fall into poverty or back into ALICE. Data collection and integrity over the last year has been a major challenge.

Because of the impact of COVID on our home visiting program, we have adapted the original model of a PAT visit to include virtual and telecommunication visits. This has been made possible by ensuring the family has adequate and stable internet connections to join by either Facebook video (preferred by most families) or Zoom (not as frequent.) Home visits still occur but are limited to outside only. The parent educator will drop off activities, books and resources for the family and then join them later online to maintain the two visits per month requirement, in addition to frequent contacts and assistance independent from parent-child visits.

For some families this is an easy transition and for others, it can be very challenging. Identifying individual goals and resource connections continue to be a focus for each family and many barriers are being overcome in areas of transportation, budgeting finances, employment and child development (i.e. Early Intervention referrals, purchasing a car after completing steps to obtaining a driver's license, opening a bank account.) Talking with families and working with children on a computer screen may not be ideal, but maintaining a safe environment while building relationships with the anticipation that we can someday return to in-person visits is our vision.

# ANALYSIS

The ESPRI initiative's overall impact on the City of Jamestown was successful in its efforts with the support of participating ESPRI agencies and their ability to support people living in poverty by helping them find success in improving their lives through education and employment. The ESPRI initiative not only touched the lives of many people in poverty, it also changed the agencies in the project in fundamentally positive ways.

Just as the formula used by the United Way as the lead agency was to provide all of the ESPRI agencies with tools and support throughout the project, the ESPRI agencies in turn were constantly updating and improving their outreach and engagement strategies to have the greatest positive impact on the populations they served. The importance of the monthly meetings and the willingness to collaborate on the part of the agencies involved cannot be stressed highly enough in terms of how this helped the agencies and the ESPRI program succeed.

In looking at how critically important flexible funding was for the success of each client, likewise it is recommended that funders look at the idea of flexible funding for agencies working in this space. The amount of innovation and change needed to make programming work when doing poverty reduction activities requires that an agency be flexible in the structure and implementation of programs. Providing agencies with flexible funds to cover whatever costs they need to absorb in order to be innovative and flexible, over and above the usual administrative costs provided in grants, could have a strongly positive impact on the ability of these agencies to do meaningful work in this space.

The benefits cliff was seen as probably the biggest hurdle from a macro standpoint, while the overall ongoing daily challenges of people living in poverty were the main hurdles to success for the clients and agencies in ESPRI. In trying to measure the impact of ESPRI, we learned that getting specific income information from clients was not successful, and it is recommended in any future program that some form of measurement for success be developed that is not contingent on knowing the income of the client or family being helped. This made it more difficult to analyze the true impact of the benefit cliff and whether that is truly a motivating factor on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, it is recommended that the benefits cliff continue to be a consideration when making funding and policy decisions as it has a major impact on the decision making of people living in poverty who seek to gain employment and get off benefits while still supporting themselves and their families.

“One gentleman served 15+ years in prison, and the CHH Work Success Coordinator met him at a point in life where success was his only priority. Referred through TANF, he was looking for an opportunity to prove his worth and placed him in the warehouse where he was able to interact with customers, clean and organize furniture. As my relationship with him grew, I was able to learn that he wanted to pursue business education and that he was looking for a factory job. I was able to link him with JBC and some temp agencies. Adecco was able to find him a job at Truck Lite where he worked double and triple time for one month. Then he was let go with no explanation; however, 5 days later he was hired by Bush Industries Furniture. I am happy to say that at present he works first shift at Bush industries and continues to volunteer at CHH.

- Community Helping Hands

# ANALYSIS

The intent throughout the ESPRI project had been to also use an equity lens, meaning being aware of the disparities in our system and how each agency could address those disparities through either program design and/or outreach. All agencies went through an improvement workshop to make them aware of equity as an important dynamic, and yet the challenges of implementing the programs and keeping up with the tracking of clients were a priority, especially in the beginning of the initiative. The events of June 2020 with Black Lives Matter and Jamestown Justice Coalition raised this issue to more prominence and has caused us to realize that we did not prioritize equity during ESPRI as much as we could have. In addition, it became increasingly clear in our discussion during monthly meetings that one of the systemic issues (in addition to the benefits cliff and the complexity of system navigation) in reducing poverty was the disproportionate impact of poverty on people of color (this was also shown in our original needs assessment done in 2017); moreover, there was a realization in the process that there were so few organizations in our county that specifically provided services to people of color. We did collect disaggregated demographic data on participants through Charity Tracker; below is a breakdown of ethnicity of individuals served by program:

AGENCY & PROGRAM NAME	Total Individuals in Charity Tracker	Hispanic	African American	Native American	Mixed/Other	White	Per not to Identify	% Individuals of Color Served
CADS	23	12	2	0	1	8	0	65%
CW*	35	18	5	0	0	12	0	66%
CHH	108	37	5	2	3	63	2	44%
JCC	52	4	5	0	1	40	2	19%
JCLC	33	3	0	0	4	30	0	21%
MHA	227	19	21	3	5	169	8	21%
TRC	151	13	11	3	5	113	6	21%
YWCA**	25	4	1	1	0	19	0	16%

\*Students who did not have work experiences as of August 2020. Numbers do not include students who took "employability skills sessions" provided by CW. When these numbers are factored in, the % of individuals of color served is 70%. Charity Tracker Data not available for CW participants due to privacy concerns as they were under 18.

\*\*Individuals engaged with a mentor. Total number entered in Charity Tracker was 61 because of children and partners in the household. When these numbers are factored in the % of individuals of color served is 34%.

In the 2017 ESPRI Community Needs Assessment, it showed that 40% of the African American population in the city of Jamestown were in poverty and 59% of the Hispanic population compared to 27% of the white population. Overall, 4.38% of the Jamestown population is African American and 9.88% is Hispanic (based on 2010 Census Data). A whole report could be devoted to factors that contribute to the above data, as well as specific explanations for some of the numbers. We present here to acknowledge that we did collect this disaggregated data and that there is more work to be done to ensure that future poverty reduction programs address the diversity, equity and inclusion challenges present in our community.

# CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the perspective of New York State, the purpose of ESPRI was to identify locally driven, collaborative and innovative solutions to reducing poverty that could potentially be brought to scale in other communities. Therefore, the natural question at the conclusion of this four-year project and in this summary report might be thus: *What was the City of Jamestown innovation?* The second natural question might simply be: *Now What?*

In essence, the planning and RFP process identified seven programs that provided services to the most high risk populations when it came to the likelihood of poverty or ALICE (individuals with substance use disorder, single mothers, teen mothers, high school students at risk of dropping out, individuals with a language barrier, and employees currently working but with a deep risk of losing their job due to multiple barriers and sometimes multifaceted challenges), and then required the following components to be added to their services:

- Collaboration (through shared database, monthly meetings, communication, coordination ongoing training)
- Ongoing measurement and evaluation (through PDSA and more regular reporting whose evaluative questions changed based on circumstances)
- Flexible Funding in the context of a trusted coaching/mentoring relationship

The initial innovation in Jamestown's ESPRI process was to have all potential competing agencies for ESPRI funding come together to learn about improvement science, client engagement, health equity and collaboration methods. This innovation changed the landscape of the usual competition for funds that can happen during a project such as ESPRI. The six workshops that all ESPRI agencies attended, we started off by discussing poems and readings that touched on the ideas of inclusiveness, needing to work together and the important ability to really see and listen to people with different outlooks and opinions. This laid the groundwork for the greater understanding and acceptance of other ESPRI agencies as partners and co-creators in the ESPRI work rather than as competitors for scarce funding dollars.

The second innovation that was critical to the success that ESPRI had was to continue this required relationship building and collaboration between agencies that continued throughout the ESPRI programs. Included in the ongoing monthly agency meetings were discussions about flexibility and the use of flexible funds, using PDSA cycles, innovations that the agencies were making and insights into better ways to work holistically with the populations the agencies were serving. Collaboration between agencies is a great goal, yet it takes work to make collaboration be something that is valuable beyond just the concept. The ESPRI project made discussions about and involvement in collaboration valuable for the agencies, leading to deeper levels of trust and sharing that benefited all of the ESPRI agencies.

Through the insights shared between agencies throughout the ESPRI project, innovations such as the use of flexible funding and determining readiness to change became ways to approach this work instead of being just concepts. The agencies benefited from collective wisdom rather than trying to figure it out on their own. The added requirement of reporting measures and evolving questions around the effectiveness of their programming also required agencies to welcome the chance to hear of innovations that other agencies were trying. ESPRI became more than just a program delivery grant, it became a new way for non-profits to work together.



# CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

As we look at next steps, one of the greatest lessons learned is this idea that non-profits need to find new and different ways to work together. This can be requested in a grant application, but making it actually work over a four-year time period is much more difficult. It is highly recommended that the processes used during ESPRI to encourage true collaboration and sharing be studied and built into future anti-poverty initiatives. The innovations that would need to be included are the shared training in improvement science, the sharing of perspectives on the work each agency does, the discussions on client engagement and what works, ongoing required meetings between agencies and acceptance of the idea of constantly measuring and updating the way things are done to find the best methods for each agency.

It was the holistic blend of all the elements above, coordinated by a backbone agency (United Way) and the choice to target the most high risk populations that was the catalytic innovation. In many ways, it was a small illustration of the well-known 2017 article, “The Curb Cut Effect” by Angela Glover Blackwell, \*\*\*\* which made the case that programs designed to benefit vulnerable groups often end up benefiting all of society. This is especially relevant as we consider issues of equity in future poverty-reduction programs. It is important to note that this approach took time to develop and mature, as did relationships with participants and agency appreciated for mandated collaboration. It also provided multiple opportunities for evaluation and learning that were beneficial for individual ESPRI agencies, but also for other sectors. Below are some brief recommendations for Policy Makers, Employers, Philanthropy and Service Providers:

“It took time for these relationships and knowledge to develop with ESPRI agencies, and much of what I noted has only happened in the last 6 months. There’s much more that could be done, and these agencies need to continue to be funded. Should these agencies lose the resources to work one-to-one with their clients, and therefore not be able to identify the residents that would benefit from a banking relationship, our county would suffer. Offering low income, low credit score families the ability to build assets and wealth is a key component to reducing poverty and to building significant economic development. Additionally, knowing that the clients will continue to receive support from the ESPRI agencies helps to manage the extremely high risk to the Credit Union. Southern Chautauqua Federal Credit Union is not a charity, we cannot grant loans to those who don’t repay us. The continued counseling and coaching are important to the success of our efforts. We do not want our outreach to fail.”

**- John Felton, Southern Chautauqua Federal Credit Union, Quote from testimony given to the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services, Public Hearing to Examine the Progress of ESPRI, December 16, 2019.**

# CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 - Policy Makers

The challenges and barriers facing people in poverty are numerous, not easy to pinpoint as they are so varied and many times are associated with policy decisions. For example, documentation requirements that require fees can alone be enough of a deterrent that it might keep someone from obtaining a full or part time job. The process of moving from a position of poverty to one of sustainable employment and freedom from government benefits needs to be studied and outlined to take into consideration how these different barriers impact a person's ability to obtain and retain employment. It is recommended that there be more studies around barriers such as the benefits cliff and its impact on decisions about employment along with other different kinds of challenges that may not be fully understood by policy makers as they are many times both universal and unique to each situation.

## 2 - Employers

Two of the ESPRI programs specifically focused on helping people in poverty with employment retention. Through the work in these programs, we learned that the more an employee retention program can be embedded in some form within the employer's organization, the better the chances of helping employees with the challenges that might cause them to quit or change jobs. Both TRC and MHA worked in this space, with TRC then developing the SAFER program to help local employers with employee retention. It is recommended that the economic development community in Chautauqua County learns more about these programs and how they can improve employee retention, especially with harder to employ or chronically underemployed workers.

## 3 - Philanthropy

There were many insights into how best to design and manage anti-poverty programs as a result of ESPRI. Two of the main factors that were considered essential for success of these kinds of programs were the idea of flexible funding, and the encouragement for agencies working in this space to learn how to better collaborate with other agencies, both to reduce duplication of services and also to increase awareness of referral sources for their clients. It is highly recommended that the philanthropic community in Chautauqua County be trained in the idea of flexible funding, including how to track this kind of funding to assure compliance with the intent of flexible funding. It is also recommended that funders consider providing flexible funds for the agencies themselves who work in this space. The ESPRI agencies became very adept at innovation and how to manage through different situation through modifications of different aspects of their programming, which helped all of them better handle the COVID situation. Recognizing that non-profit agencies need to have some flexibility in program design and delivery and providing them with some funding to cover the costs of the innovations necessary to keep their programs working effectively should be considered in future grant funding discussions.

# CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4 - Service Providers

One of the benefits to the ESPRI agencies was the opportunity to learn more about other local agencies and to set up cross-referral systems and other ways to collaborate. When we look at the challenges and barriers faced by people living in poverty, it brings to mind the saying that it takes a community, and in this case, it takes a community of agencies providing different services to really impact significant numbers of people living in poverty and ALICE families. It is recommended that anti-poverty agencies and programs in the Chautauqua County area find ways to not just learn about all of the services available, but to also actively look for ways to increase levels of collaboration. For the ESPRI agencies, this wasn't an immediate outcome from ESPRI, but through ongoing meetings, common training sessions and encouragement on the part of the funding agency, new and innovative ways of working together were developed.

### Appreciative Inquiry

The ESPRI agencies themselves went through an Appreciative Inquiry exercise as the "capstone" to their monthly agency meetings, and identified the key factors that they would like to see in future programs. Their recommendations were as follows, and are also incorporated in the lessons learned and recommendations:

- Make flexible funding part of any anti-poverty program
- Expand the "Bridges Out of Poverty" training to organizations and institutions outside of the non-profit sector including Funders, Health & Human Services, Educational institutions and Employers. Strategic consideration should be given to which individuals in an organization attend training so that both leadership and frontline staff benefit.
- Collaboration should be funded and facilitated in an intentional way, beyond simply referrals and linkages.
- Relationship building is key within the organizations working on reducing poverty and with as many external partners as possible.
- The recognition that we all have biases is important and to remember that they are there when making decisions about people living in poverty.
- There needs to be a way to get more information out about all anti-poverty programs to more agencies and organizations, and more integration within these programs.

# NOTES & RESOURCES

- For more information on ALICE (Asset, Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed): <https://www.unitedforalice.org/new-york>
- For More information on the Benefits Cliff: <https://www.benefitscliff.com/>
- For public facing information about ESPRI, including the 2017 Community Needs Assessment, a list of ESPRI Taskforce Members, articles about ESPRI and other information, visit: <https://www.uwayscc.org/empire-state-poverty-reduction-initiative>.

\* Aggregate data pulled from Charity Tracker as of 9/12/21.

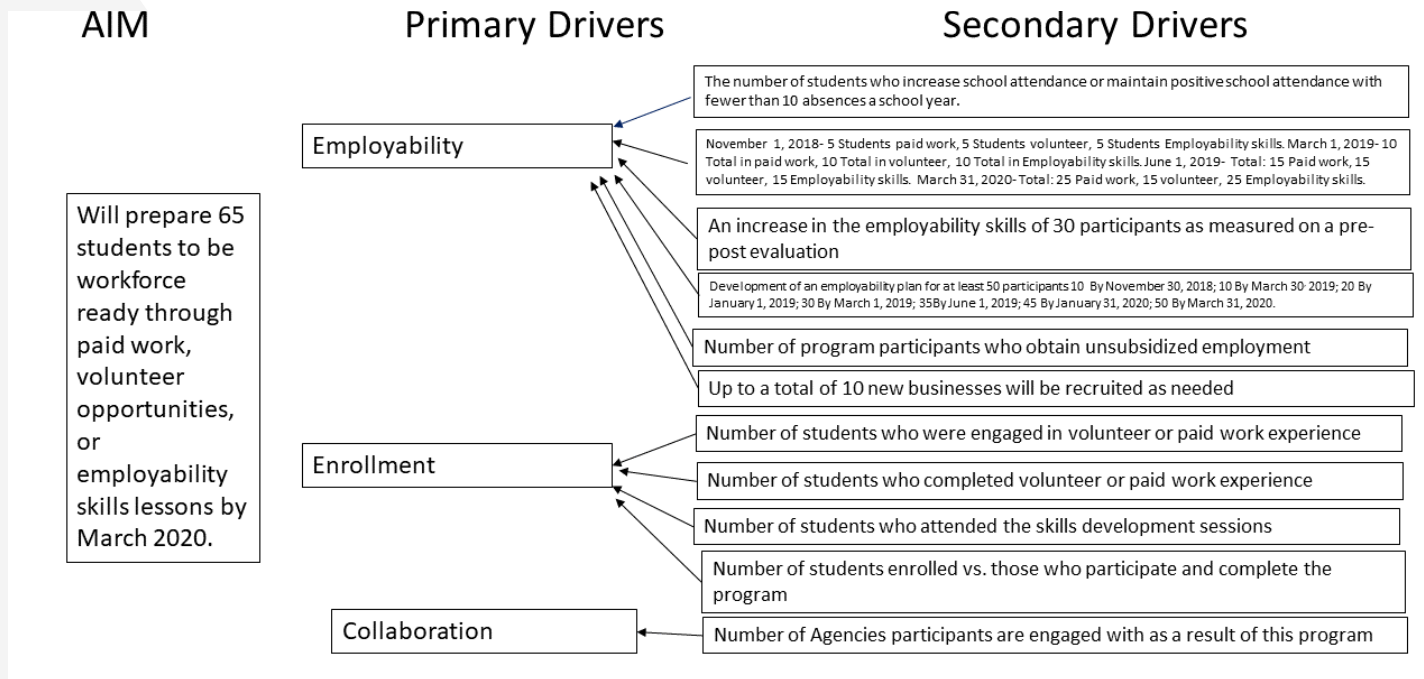
\*\* Collaboration Continuum graphic from NYCON (New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc <https://www.nycon.org/>

\*\*\* Benefits cliff graph is an aggregate sample pulled from multiple sources from New York State income/benefits. Note this does not include the additional benefit from childcare subsidies, which is often a major factor in coming to the edge of a “cliff.”

\*\*\*\* Blackwell, Angela Glover, The Curbcut Effect, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2017: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\\_curb\\_cut\\_effect](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_curb_cut_effect)

# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## Chautauqua Works: SUCCESS



## Goal Attainment

Number of students served:	91
Number of students with subsidized paid work experience:	47
Number of students who obtained unsubsidized employment:	15
Number of students who completed "employability skills lessons"	91
Students who completed volunteer experiences:	11

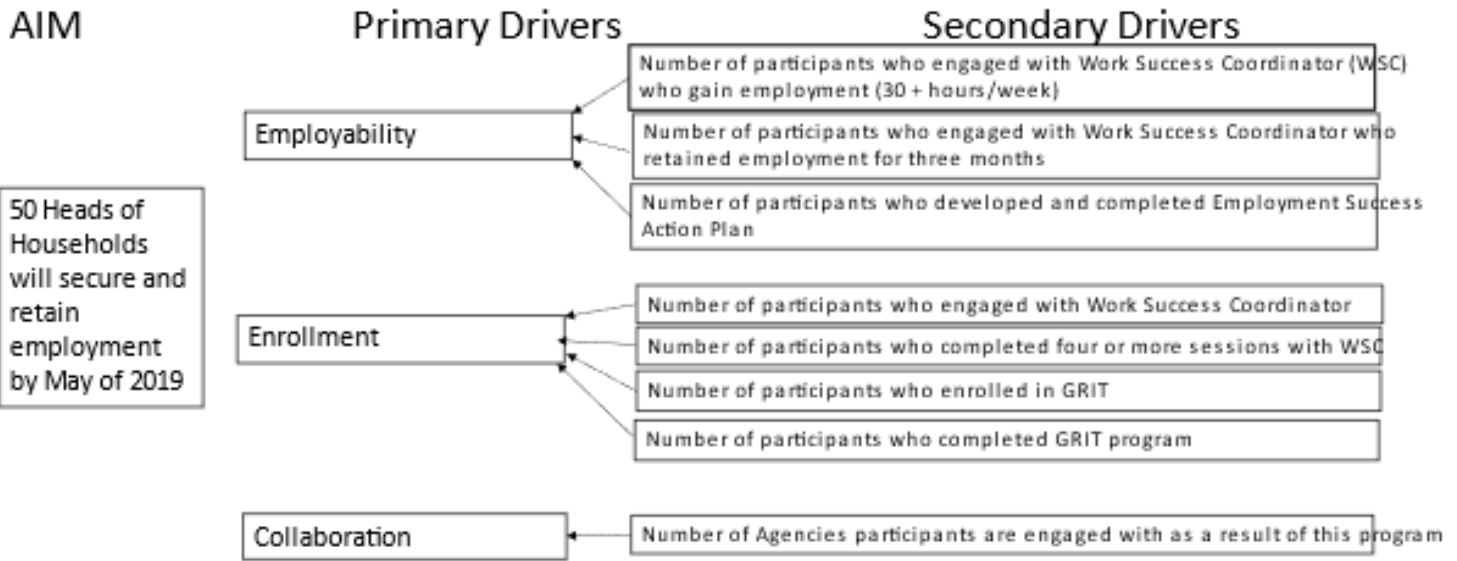
## Impact on Agency Culture

Through the ESPRI Program, we have learned that meeting participants where they are is critical to participant and program success. To expect participants to "find" programs is unrealistic. We must make every effort whenever possible to bring programming to potential participants rather than wait for them to somehow make their way to us. Additionally, the earlier that we can begin developing the work readiness skills of our young people through work readiness programs, the greater their success will be in the labor market helping them and our local businesses. Finally, we learned that young people truly want and need human interaction even though they appear to connect mainly through online social media tools.



# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## Community Helping Hands: GRIT TO GREAT



## Goal Attainment

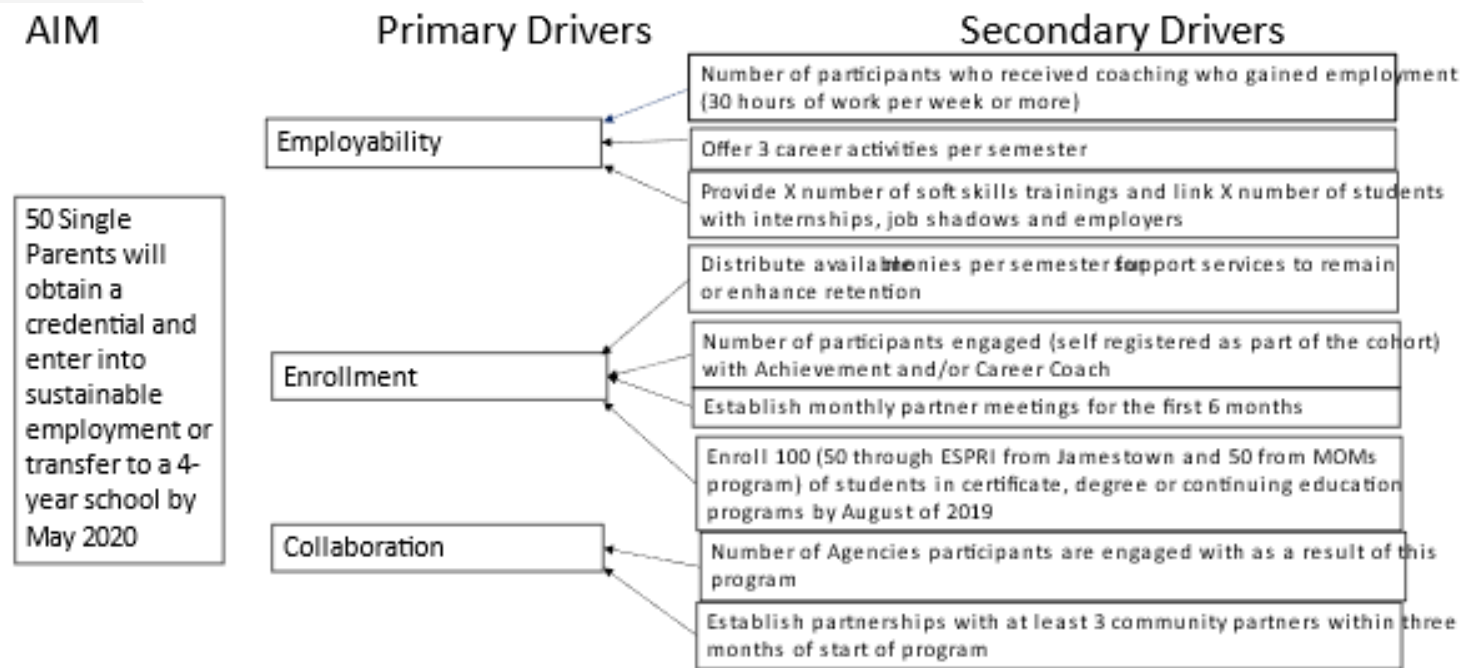
Number of individuals served:	162
Number of individuals employed:	39
Number of individuals retained employment after 90 days	27
Number of individuals who enrolled in education/training programs	14
Number of individuals who completed "Grit" workshop	43
Number of Individuals Assisted Thru Flexible Funding	43

## Impact on Agency Culture

The ESPRI program has allowed us the opportunity to take our volunteers to the next level of success. Before we never had someone specifically to influence and guide our volunteers to find either a career or education. Adding the workforce development position allowed us to really focus and give our volunteers the opportunity to better themselves which in turns better the community. Having someone who is bilingual in that position has allowed us to work with and serve the Spanish speaking community. We also learned about what works in terms of incentives that we gave people for completing our workshop. We started with a high value and realized that it didn't have any effect on whether or not they would stick around. For our last workshop we'll be trying something new. We will offer incentives if they keep in contact with us after the workshop.

# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## Jamestown Community College: SPREE



## Goal Attainment

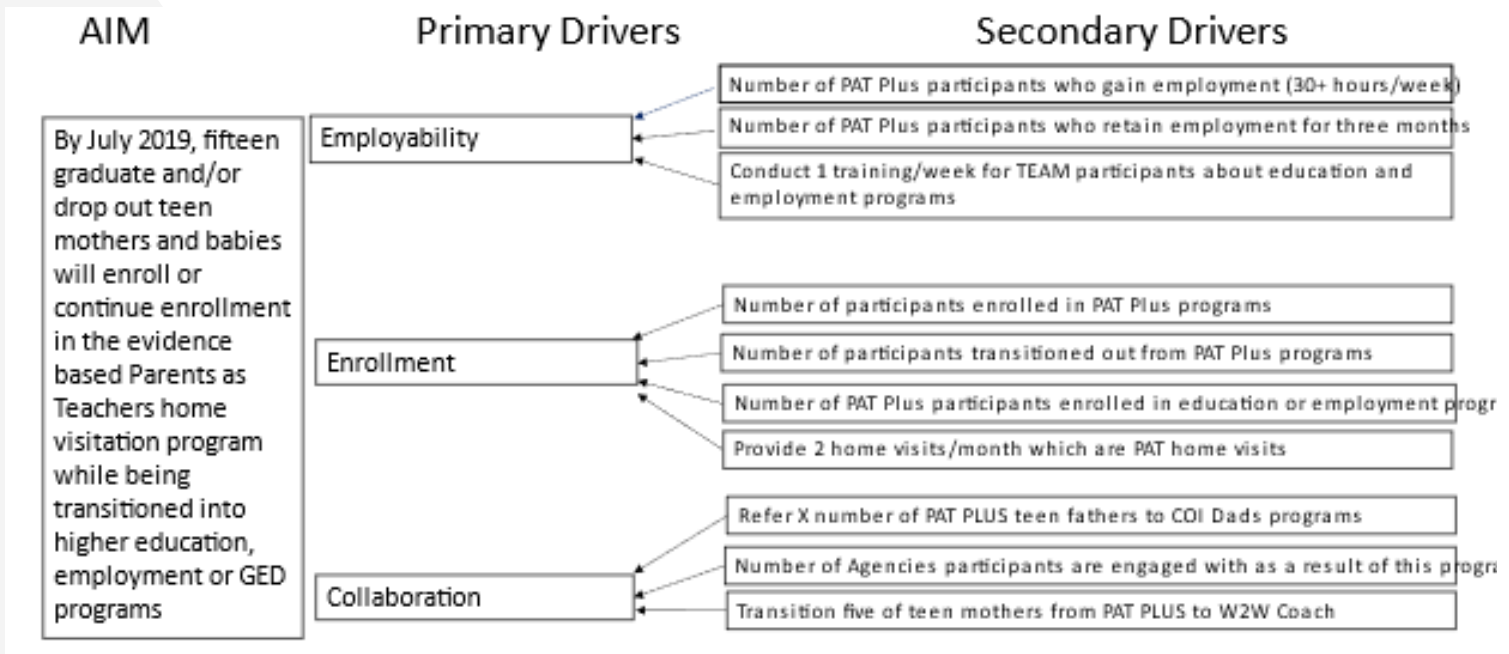
Number of individuals served (Jamestown only):	123
Number of individuals served (Total SPREE Program, which includes outside 14701):	375
Number of SPREE students graduated (Jamestown):	20
Number of SPREE students graduated (Total SPREE Program):	63
Students who transferred to a 4 year institution:	8
Number of agencies participants are engaged in as a result of SPREE:	46
Number of Children impacted (Jamestown):	264
Number of Children impacted (Total SPREE):	474

## Impact on Agency Culture

SUNY Jamestown Community College's, ESPRI program - Single Parents Reaching Education to Employment Program (SPREE) has made an impact that is significant and far-reaching both at the college and in the surrounding area communities. SPREE has helped address the issues faced by single parents and others as they arise through holistic, coordinated and personalized, non-academic/academic supports and services. SPREE has worked collaboratively with other student service departments at the college to build on existing programs and has developed new community partnerships with local, non-profit agencies to expand the plethora of needed services to our students. When viewed as a whole, the SPREE team at JCC has learned that the college together with its surrounding, local community partners can effectively provide intervention strategies and practices that cultivate single parent student success and promote program completion through employment.

# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## Jamestown Community Learning Council: PAT PLUS



### Goal Attainment

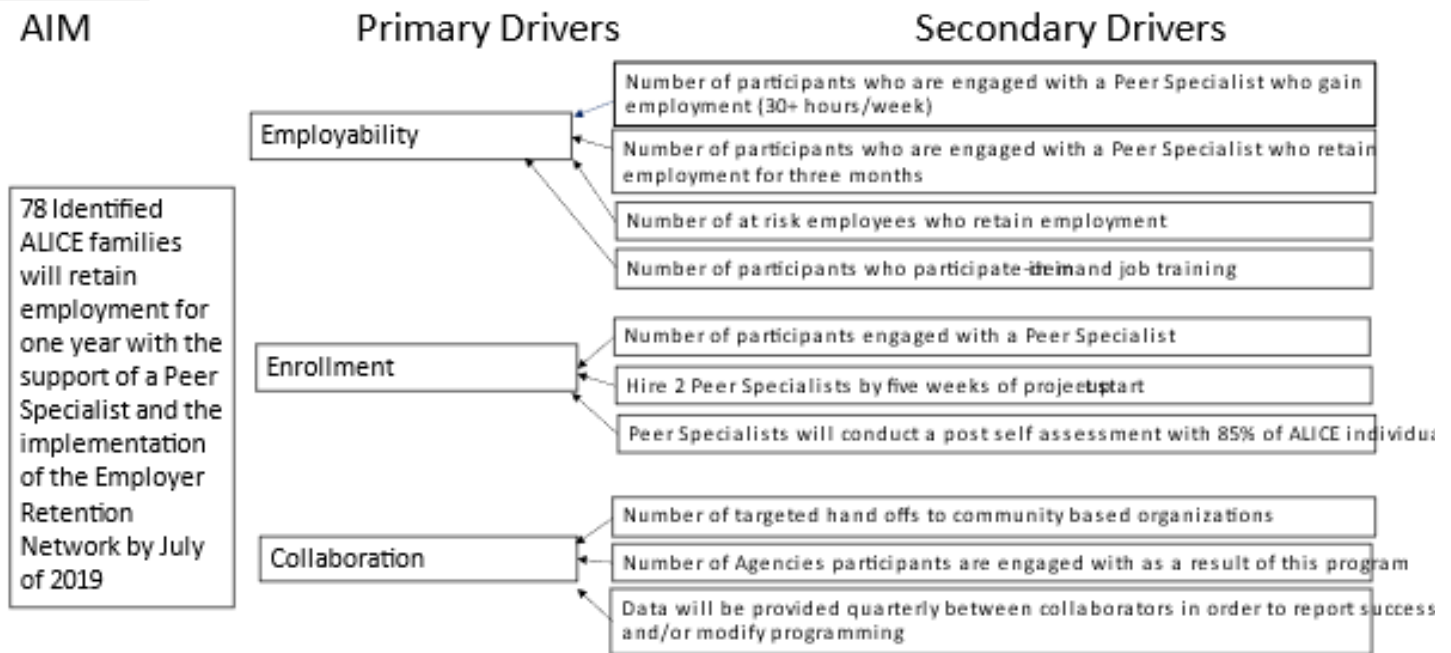
Number of teen moms served:	22
Number of individuals impacted (children and household members):	52
Number of individuals employed	17
Number of individuals retained employment after 90 days	15
Number of individuals assisted with barriers through flexible funding	14
Number of financial barriers overcome	37
Number of PAT Visits	642

### Impact on Agency Culture

Through ESPRI, we learned techniques for reviewing what works and what doesn't. As a result, JCLC is looking at what has worked (or not) for PAT PLUS and considering ways we can implement what we've learned into the structure of our other programs. One example of this is how we track employment and education goals of the participants. By looking into the data and outcomes of our participants, we discovered that job retention is a reoccurring dilemma. By then evaluating the various obstructions to employment retention, PAT PLUS has implemented several techniques to further support families, including a focus on reliable transportation, support to impact the family as a whole and increased referrals to outside agencies that can address these challenges.

# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## Mental Health Association: OPEN



## Goal Attainment

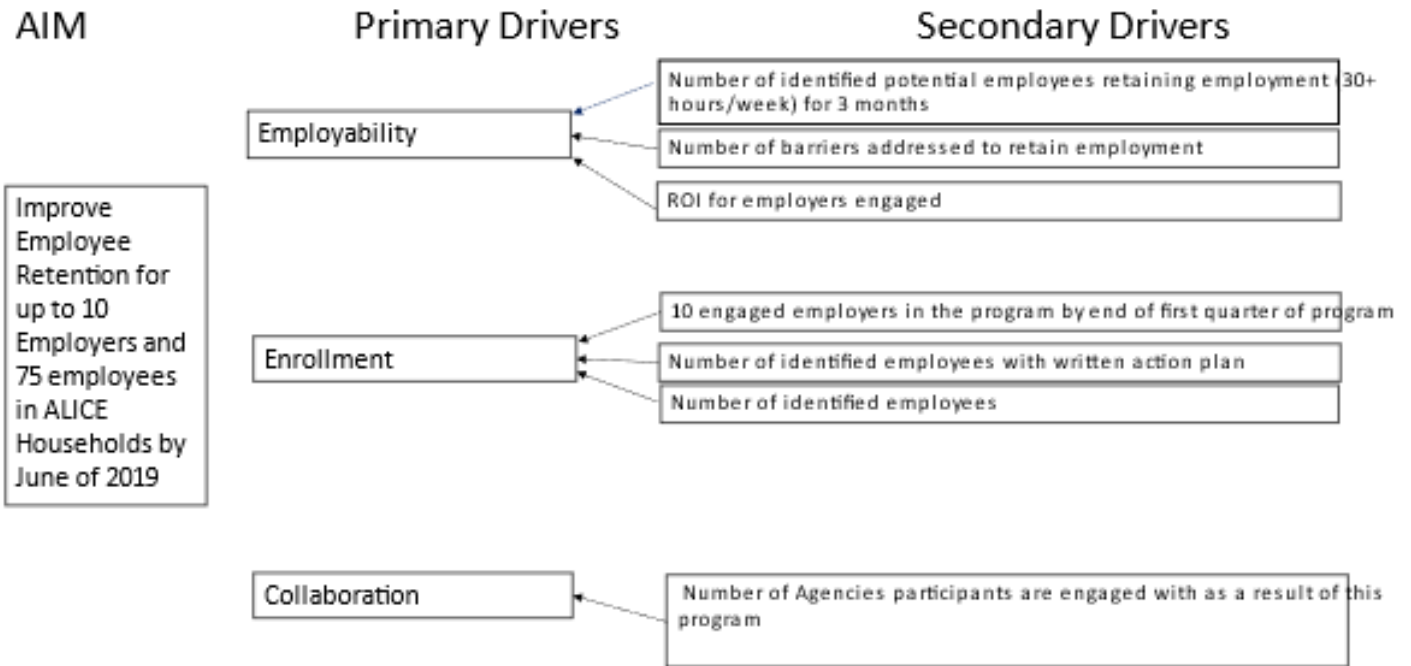
Number of individuals served through Employment focused peer specialist:	227
Number of individuals who have secured employment:	113
Number of individuals who have retained employment after 90 days	128
Number of individuals enrolled in educational and/or training programs:	34
Number of Individuals Assisted Thru Flexible Funding.	69
Number of Financial Barriers Overcome.	81

## Impact on Agency Culture

We have learned a lot from working with the ESPRI team. First and foremost, we have learned the incredibly wide range of services offered by our partners. Next, we have learned, and keep learning, how important data is to collect. Since joining the ESPRI program we have actually adopted Charity Tracker as our operating system at the MHA. It has been a very easy system to personalize, allowing us to get categories and statistics that are specific to our organization. Further, learning how to creatively adapt and overcome obstacles through brainstorming and refining ideas nonjudgmentally has been slowly worked in to how we respond to unforeseen changes in operation, such as we have seen this year. Valuing creativity and finding tools to encourage it is one of the most valuable tools we had been given.

# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## The Resource Center: SAFER



## Goal Attainment

Number of individuals served	160
Number of individuals who retained employment 90 days after enrolling in SAFER	156
Number of individuals assisted with barriers through Flexible Funding	106
Number of financial barriers overcome	210
Number of non monetary resources provided	504
Number of community agencies are engaged with as a result of SAFER	145
Number of Employers participating in SAFER	14

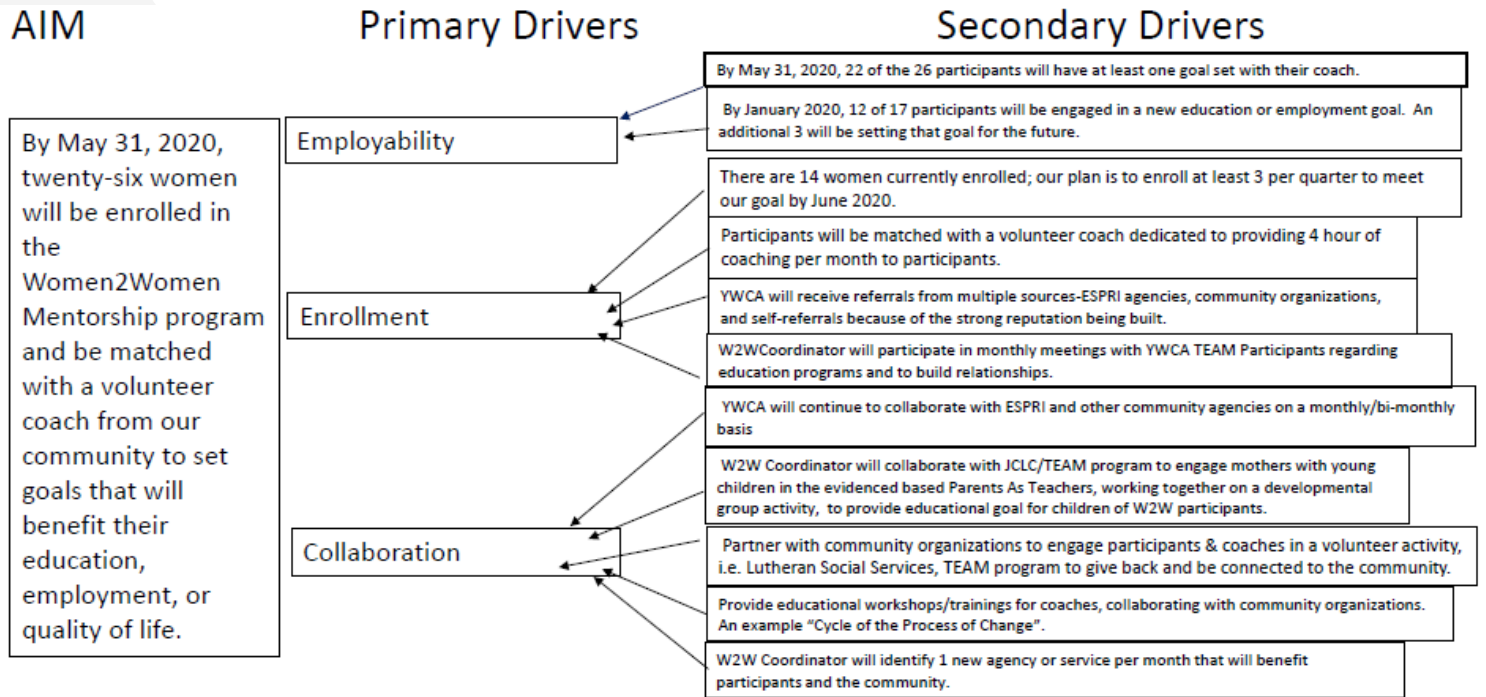
## Impact on Agency Culture

The ESPRI supported SAFER program has assisted TRC in trying to model to our own Employee Assistance Program to be more hands on and thorough while supporting our own employees. The newsletters and information found through navigation has been sent out agency wide to TRC staff as well as SAFER partners. TRC has become a lot more aware of resources that are available outside of the OPWDD world that many of our services are offered through. This helps with sustainability and opportunity. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not always need "special" services that are designed for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; often times the barriers they are experiencing have nothing to do with their disability. What we have learned about employee needs to help with retention can be applied to our own workforce and the other clients we serve.



# PROGRAM SUMMARIES

## YWCA: Women2Women



## Goal Attainment

Number of individuals served (women and household members):	61
Number of women engaged with W2W Mentoring Program:	25
Number of women employed:	13
Number of women enrolled in education/training programs:	9

## Impact on Agency Culture

The Women2Women coaching program is built on relationships, but it is difficult to initiate those relationships. Through ESPRI we developed relationships with other agencies and we learned of other programs that would work well with YWCA programming. Because of the success of many of the ESPRI funded agencies, the YWCA Jamestown is looking to partner with ESPRI agencies to provide Grit to Great Program and the Bridges out of Poverty Program to the women living in our Transitional Housing.

**JAMESTOWN** | **ESPRI**  
Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

