



Evidence Document

for Higher Learning Commission Reaccreditation

Document Title: PROMISE Project Enrolls Teen Number 2000, Praised for Collaborative Efforts

Office of Origin: College of Education and Health Professions

Document Summary:

In April 2016, the Arkansas PROMISE project met its goal of enrolling 2000 teens with disabilities. PROMISE is funded by a \$35.7 million federal grant awarded in 2013 to the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Education.

PROMISE Project Enrolls Teen No. 2,000, Praised for Collaborative Efforts

April 15, 2016



Photo courtesy of Photo courtesy of Arkansas PROMISE

Mercedes Reed, center, a PROMISE participant, is pictured at a PROMISE recognition event with, from left, Alexandria Payne, her mother; Jaclyn Billins, PROMISE connector for Saline County; and Daylana Reed, her sister.

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – The [Arkansas PROMISE](#) project met its goal of enrolling 2,000 teens with disabilities this week, more than two weeks ahead of the deadline set for the federally funded project. Enrollment began in September 2014.

More than 100 PROMISE staff members throughout Arkansas celebrated the milestone when the 2,000th teen was enrolled Tuesday morning. PROMISE is funded by a \$35.7 million federal grant awarded in 2013 to the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Education. The research grant, believed to be the

largest in the history of the University of Arkansas, provides [paid summer work experiences](#) for teens with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income.

“I’m very excited and proud that we were able to reach such a huge accomplishment with the help of all of our staff and partners around the state,” said Alejandro Ortiz, the recruitment coordinator for the state. “We had to be creative and put a lot of effort into reaching families. I think our success was due to the collaborative nature of our recruitment efforts; we not only had regional recruitment staff working full time, other local staff members, partnering agencies and community organizations assisted with the process. Together, we were able to do some really great, creative and successful enrollment events around the state that pushed us forward.”

One of those events was “Pie Day,” when PROMISE staff members in southwest Little Rock went door to door, delivering pies to eligible families the weekend before Thanksgiving.

“We ordered 315 sweet potato, pumpkin and apple pies from Community Bakery in Little Rock,” Ortiz said. “We had eight teams of two staff members who worked about 10 hours over two days dropping by homes of eligible youth to talk about Arkansas PROMISE. Shortly after the home visit efforts, we enrolled 45 youth in southwest Little Rock.”

Brent Thomas Williams, associate professor of rehabilitation education and research who serves as principal investigator of the project, said Pie Day was brainstormed as a solution to a lull in response to existing recruitment efforts.

“We knew we needed to do something different,” Williams said. “Pie Day has reached near legendary status as a recruitment technique among people who work with us at the U.S. Department of Education and Social Security Administration. Pie Day is one example of the extraordinary adaptability and innovation the staff of Arkansas PROMISE have brought to bear on this project.”

During the five years of the grant, 1,000 Arkansas teens who receive Supplemental Security Income will have two paid summer work experiences as well as additional training and services. The other group of 1,000 teens will receive only the usual services provided to teens with disabilities. Researchers will collect and analyze data from the two groups to help the federal government determine whether the PROMISE project should be used as a model for future programs.

Challenges included explaining what the project is to teens and their families as well as to social service and employment agencies, while making sure everyone understood the research aspect of the project, said Philip Adams, PROMISE project director.

“There was a balance we had to maintain so they understand this is not just about getting the teens off Social Security but more importantly about setting and achieving goals for employment and education,” Adams said. “With support and exposure to work they wouldn’t have otherwise, we believe they will be better equipped as adults to make the choice between a monthly benefit and employment.”

Michael Gamel-McCormick is director of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities PROMISE Technical Assistance Center in Washington. He has a network of 125 programs around the country to draw on for ideas, resources and training to help all the PROMISE projects provide services more efficiently. Arkansas, California, Maryland, New York and Wisconsin, and a consortium of six states – Utah, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Colorado and Arizona – received the PROMISE funding.

Gamel-McCormick said the Arkansas PROMISE project proved to have an “amazing capacity for employment efforts.” He has asked Arkansas PROMISE staff to provide information to other PROMISE projects about the successful efforts to connect with local workforce boards and create new relationships among government agencies.

“The Arkansas PROMISE people have been the most collaborative and so willing to interact with the other five projects,” Gamel-McCormick said. “As a unit, their sheer expertise is impressive

and they are an exemplar of what good coordination and collaboration should be.”

The project was initially funded for \$32.4 million and given a supplemental award of \$3.3 million last year. The additional funding will be used in part to employ the recruitment coordinators through the life of the grant in 2018. Adams said the recruiters will shift to the role of retention specialists with Ortiz directing their efforts, including an incentive program to help keep teens and their families involved in the project.

About Arkansas PROMISE: The PROMISE project is a joint initiative of four federal agencies: the departments of education, health and human services, labor and the Social Security Administration. Its underlying premise is that improved coordination between services can improve outcomes for youth and their families. Its goals also include decreasing reliance on SSI and reducing the cost to the federal government. The grant was submitted through a partnership between the university, the Arkansas Department of Education and other state agencies. Other partners are the Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, Arkansas Workforce Centers, Arkansas Department of Human Services, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, Sources for Community Independent Living Services, the Clinton Foundation, Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, U of A CURRENTS, Partners for Inclusive Communities and Arkansas Research Center.

About the University of Arkansas: The University of Arkansas provides an internationally competitive education for undergraduate and graduate students in more than 200 academic programs. The university contributes new knowledge, economic development, basic and applied research, and creative activity while also providing service to academic and professional disciplines. The Carnegie Foundation classifies the University of Arkansas among only 2 percent of universities in America that have the highest level of research activity. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks the University of Arkansas among its top American public research universities. Founded in 1871, the University of Arkansas comprises 10 colleges and schools and maintains a low student-to-faculty ratio that promotes personal attention and close mentoring.

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