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R.I.S.E. Up Program  
Mercy Health Career Development Center  
Final Evaluation Report

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Submitted to: Joyce Rohrer  
Director of Outcomes  
The SOURCE

Prepared by: Drew Curtis and Jessa Lewis Valentine  
DVP-PRAXIS LTD

8888 Keystone Crossing, Suite 1300  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240  
715-281-9600  
[drew@dvp-praxis.org](mailto:drew@dvp-praxis.org)

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## Executive Summary

Created and operated through a partnership between The SOURCE, West Michigan Works, and Mercy Health, and with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center was opened in March 2019 in order to serve Grand Rapids area job seekers and Mercy Health “colleagues” (incumbent employees). At the Career Development Center, a Resource Navigator and two Career Coaches work with job seekers and colleagues to remove barriers to employment and career advancement and to coach participants through an Evidence-Based Career Coaching process to help them reach their professional goals.

This final evaluation report provides a summative assessment of R.I.S.E. Up program implementation and outcomes, drawing upon a mixed-methods evaluation conducted by DVP-PRAXIS LTD designed to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the participants served by the R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center? What do we understand about participants’ demographic characteristics including race, ethnicity, gender, and neighborhood of residence? Which services do they receive?
2. What are the outcomes for participants served at the Career Development Center? Which services are correlated with positive employment and career advancement outcomes?
3. How are communication, collaboration, use of data, and leadership incorporated into R.I.S.E Up program structures and processes, and how do those factors accelerate or impede implementation? What can we infer about how implementation observations relate to participant outcomes?

Today’s Career Development Center has changed considerably since its start over two years ago. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the physical space and forced staff to develop new workflow systems to serve a population of healthcare workers and job seekers reeling from the many devastating effects of the pandemic. Despite these challenges to the fledgling program, R.I.S.E. Up leaders and staff have adapted into a new, remote model that is being considered for expansion across Michigan and have worked with hundreds of job seekers and colleagues as they strive to meet their career goals.

- **Between March 2019 and May 2021, the Career Development Center worked with 348 R.I.S.E. Up participants, 18% of whom achieved positive outcomes in terms of employment or career advancement.** New participant engagement slowed notably with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic but picked up speed again in 2021.
- **The R.I.S.E. Up program is reaching a racially diverse population of participants, more than one-half of whom are African American or Hispanic, and nearly 40% of whom reside in a Neighborhood of Focus characterized by higher poverty and unemployment rates.** There are notable differences between the two key groups served by the R.I.S.E. Up program, with job seekers representing a more racially diverse and a more economically disadvantaged population compared to colleagues.

- **Participants who worked with Coaches to achieve key coaching milestones and who engaged with the Resource Navigator to resolve barriers were more likely to achieve positive employment and advancement outcomes.** Among the 348 participants served by the Center through May 2021, 82% have been “actively coached” meaning they have completed key steps of the career coaching process, and 38% have worked with the Resource Navigator to resolve a barrier to employment or career advancement.

As partner organizations continue to discuss the future of the R.I.S.E. Up program, including the method of service delivery and the possibility of expanding the model to other locations, observations from this evaluation offer several considerations.

As the remote service model becomes increasingly favored by program leaders, **attention should be focused on how to develop trust and relationships remotely, and how to create an accessible and mobile-friendly user experience for those who lack necessary electronic equipment or the technical skills required to navigate the career coaching platform on their own.** Continuing to explore, communicate about, and improve the SkillsFirst user experience, including streamlining the user interface and making the program accessible from many devices, can help lower participant barriers to engagement. As of summer 2021, Career Center Coaches were developing and piloting participant instructional videos which could help participants navigate the SkillsFirst platform.

**The continued development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will aid in the stability and institutional memory of the current R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center at Mercy Health and can serve as a critical resource to others interested in replicating the program elsewhere.** In addition to capturing important process and workflow details of the Center, the current SOPs also cover promising practices and guidance on how to engage participants in a way that demonstrates respect and facilitates trust. This holistic approach to SOP development is extremely important for designing a program that serves participants equitably, and the codification of Center processes and engagement approaches will support the continued success of this and future Career Centers.

**Continuing to examine differences between job seekers and colleagues, as well as racial and ethnic differences in participant services and outcomes, will be critical to future equity-focused improvements to the program model.** The Center’s current mission of coaching and removing barriers for job seekers in addition to incumbent workers is key to the equitable reach of the program, given that job seekers are more racially diverse and economically disadvantaged than colleagues. However, program data suggests that job seekers are less likely to engage with the Center’s support services and receive less financial support. Despite lower service uptake, job seekers are more likely to have attained a positive outcome (employment) compared to colleagues (career advancement). In addition, evaluation results suggest that the Center is doing a good job helping Black R.I.S.E. Up participants reach their employment and advancement goals compared to other groups, whereas fewer Hispanic participants appear to be benefitting from Center services. Disaggregating and analyzing participant service and outcome trends like these allow staff and stakeholders to understand and act upon important equity-related themes.

## Introduction

Created as a partnership between The SOURCE, West Michigan Works (WMW), and Mercy Health (MH), and with the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center was designed to improve employment, retention, and advancement for healthcare employees and job seekers in the Grand Rapids area. At the start of the initiative, The SOURCE contracted with DVP-PRAXIS LTD to serve as an independent evaluator to provide formative feedback on initiative progress as well as an external assessment of employment outcomes for program participants. The mixed-method evaluation was designed to answer the following core questions:

1. Who are the participants served by the R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center, including demographic characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender, as well as neighborhood of residence? Which services do they receive?
2. What are the outcomes for participants served at the Career Development Center? Which services are correlated with positive employment and career advancement outcomes?
3. How are communication, collaboration, use of data, and leadership incorporated into R.I.S.E Up program structures and processes, and how do those factors accelerate or impede implementation? What are the relationships between implementation observations and participant outcomes?

This final evaluation report provides a summative assessment of R.I.S.E. Up program implementation and outcomes, drawing upon evaluation activities conducted by DVP-PRAXIS LTD between the opening of the Mercy Health Career Development Center in March 2019 through August 2021. Data collection activities included ongoing communication with the R.I.S.E. Up project leadership at The SOURCE, two in-depth qualitative engagements in 2019 (in-person site visit) and 2021 (virtual engagement) with key R.I.S.E. Up leaders, staff, and participants, and ongoing assessment of administrative data covering R.I.S.E. Up services and participant outcomes.

This report begins with an overview of R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center goals and operations, followed by a description of the evaluation design and the data collection methods employed. It then offers an assessment of R.I.S.E. Up implementation and outcomes, including a description of services provided to colleagues and job seekers by the Career Development Center, employment and advancement outcomes for R.I.S.E. Up participants, and a summary of high-level implementation themes. The report concludes with considerations for the future of the R.I.S.E. Up program based on evaluation findings.

## The R.I.S.E. Up Program: An Overview

Launched in March 2019 and implemented through Mercy Health’s Career Development Center, the R.I.S.E. Up program works with Mercy Health “colleagues” (incumbent employees) and outside job seekers to resolve employment barriers and provide coaching toward employment and career advancement in healthcare. Using terms of the R.I.S.E. Up program, the Center seeks to help job seekers from the Grand Rapids area “move in” to employment at Mercy Health, and to help Mercy Health colleagues advance and “move up” to desired career opportunities.

The Career Development Center was initially located within the Mercy Health hospital complex, inviting colleagues and job seekers to stop by in-person to engage with the Resource Navigator and Career Coaches. Engagement moved almost entirely to phone, email, and video chat with the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, and as of August 2021 operations continue to be remote.

At the core of the R.I.S.E. Up program is a seven-step Evidence-Based Career Pathways model which offers personalized coaching and additional support to help job seekers and colleagues develop and achieve their career goals. The seven steps of the Career Pathways model – Intake, Coaching, Support, Learning, Credentials, Profiles, and Placement – are designed to move participants through learning and self-assessment, to supports acquisition and skill development, and eventually to identification of and employment in the participants’ target job.<sup>1</sup> Each step contains a variety of assessments and activities that can be completed by participants and Coaches using SkillsFirst, a technological platform aligned to the Evidence-Based Career Pathways process. R.I.S.E. Up career coaching services are supplemented by personalized, wrap-around supports provided by the Resource Navigator that can assist job seekers and colleagues in addressing a variety of barriers to employment or advancement that can include transportation, childcare, eldercare, housing, and training needs.

Central to the delivery of these coaching services and personalized supports are three core staff members who together drive the R.I.S.E. Up program, with support from their respective organizations.

### *Resource Navigator, The SOURCE*

The R.I.S.E. Up Resource Navigator engages with all Career Development Center participants who identify barriers to employment or advancement. The Resource Navigator works with participants to understand their personal goals and circumstances and connects them to corresponding financial or other resources from The SOURCE, Mercy Health, or other public and non-profit benefits. In addition to providing a connection to available resources, the Resource Navigator is focused on developing trust with participants and commits time to a wide range of direct service tasks. These tasks are widely varied and have included helping families find legal support, driving to

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<sup>1</sup> Guest, B., Guest, J., and Gimarc, R. (2019). Evidence-Based Career Pathways (EBCP). Research Brief, Metrics Reporting, Inc.

participant residences to collect necessary signatures, or assisting participants in securing insurance for their family members.

#### *Career Coach, Mercy Health*

The Mercy Health Career Coach works with incumbent Mercy Health staff or “colleagues” to identify opportunities for professional advancement. This coaching is intended to help colleagues gain skills and insights to develop professionally while helping Mercy Health retain and cultivate internal talent. Over the course of the grant, Mercy Health leaders, Career Center staff, and talent acquisition personnel have targeted six job families (Environmental Services, Nutritional Services, Medical Assistant, Patient Care Assistant, Phlebotomist, and Pharmacy Technician) in their messaging about the Mercy Health Career Coach and other Career Development Center services. The Mercy Health Career Coach serves as an intermediary between colleagues and talent acquisition staff to identify available opportunities, arrange interviews, and provide constructive advice and feedback before and after interviews.

#### *Career Coach, West Michigan Works*

The West Michigan Works Career Coach works with outside job seekers interested in careers in healthcare to identify employment opportunities at Mercy Health. The West Michigan Works Career Coach receives referrals from West Michigan Works branches and other community partners, and then invites possible participants to an introductory session. The Coach helps identify interest and skills compatibility between the job seeker and available Mercy Health positions, and provides advising and referrals to talent acquisition staff with available job opportunities. While the populations served by the Mercy Health and West Michigan Works coaches are different, both coaches work with participants to navigate the Evidence-Based Career Pathways process and provide constructive feedback and advising preceding and following interviews.

While these three staff members make up the core of the Career Development Center and R.I.S.E. Up process, leadership, talent acquisition staff, and administrative staff from The SOURCE, Mercy Health, and West Michigan Works enable the Center to effectively serve job seekers and colleagues. These leaders and staff provide support and guidance to the Center, with Mercy Health providing day-to-day Center leadership, coordinating efforts across partner organizations and setting high-level goals and priorities. Additionally, Mercy Health talent acquisition leaders work with core Center staff on an ongoing basis, coordinating on job seeker and colleague referrals, and providing constructive feedback to Coaches on participants applying for Mercy Health positions.

## **Evaluation Methods & Data Collection**

The DVP-PRAXIS LTD team designed a mixed-methods evaluation balancing qualitative and quantitative data collection as well as formative and summative feedback. The mixed-methods approach provided opportunities for the evaluation team to offer formative feedback to guide

program implementation, enabled qualitative insights and observation to inform the analysis of quantitative results, and ensured that the voices of the intended beneficiaries of R.I.S.E. Up were included in the evaluation. This approach is particularly important given the R.I.S.E. Up program’s focus on serving participants equitably as it allowed for the evaluation to understand and break down participant experiences and outcomes through multiple lenses.

In order to monitor program implementation and participant characteristics and outcomes throughout the grant period, the DVP-PRAXIS LTD evaluation team collected data through ongoing engagements with program leaders and staff, conducted periodic site visits and check-ins, and collected program data at three points in time.

*Ongoing Engagement*

Throughout the grant period, the evaluation team maintained regular contact with the project lead and Resource Navigator to stay up-to-date on progress related to the structures and processes of the Center. These ongoing conversations allowed the evaluation team to stay informed between in-depth visits and data transfers.

*In-Person and Virtual Site Visits*

Over the course of the program, the evaluation team conducted two in-depth site visits, plus one interim check-in with the Center’s Coaches and Navigator. During the two in-depth visits, a two-person evaluation team engaged in semi-structured interviews and focus groups with staff at the Career Development Center, Mercy Health leaders and talent acquisition staff, as well as a sample of Mercy Health colleagues and outside job seekers who had experienced the program. These conversations covered a range of subjects including:

- The ongoing status and development of Career Center operations
- The impact of the pandemic on Center operations and participants
- Communication and collaboration mechanisms at the Center
- Leadership support from each partnering organization
- Differences between outside job seekers and Mercy Health colleagues
- Greatest program successes and challenges
- Future-oriented goals and strategies to achieve them

<p><b>October 2018</b> <b>In-Person Visit</b></p>	<p><b>June 2020</b> <b>Virtual Check-In</b></p>	<p><b>June 2021</b> <b>Virtual Visit</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 MH, WMW, and SOURCE staff interviewed</li> <li>• 4 participants across two focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 MH, WMW, and SOURCE staff interviewed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 MH, WMW, and SOURCE staff interviewed</li> <li>• 5 participant individual interviews</li> </ul>



### *R.I.S.E. Up Administrative Data*

Two primary digital systems were used to inform this evaluation: Salesforce and SkillsFirst. Salesforce is used by the Resource Navigator to track participant barriers to advancement, as well as information on the supports and resources provided to address those barriers. SkillsFirst is the custom platform developed by ThinkOptimal for the R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center and is used by participants and Coaches alike as they work through the Evidence-Based Career Pathways process.

Together, these two data sources provide information on services and resources received through the Resource Navigator, as well as key coaching activities facilitated by Career Coaches. Both systems capture demographic information on participants including age, gender, race and ethnicity, education level, income, and geographic area of residence. Data from these systems also provide important outcome information for program participants, including employment secured or career advancement at Mercy Health as well as receipt of training or education services to enable progress toward career goals. Over the course of the evaluation, Center staff transferred relevant data to the evaluation team annually. Cumulative data spanning the period March 2019 through May 2021 are used to inform this final evaluation report.

In addition to providing the necessary data for this end-of-grant assessment, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed throughout the grant period to provide interim feedback related to implementation themes, descriptions of participants served, service uptake, and participant outcomes. These interim reports were designed to offer Center staff, leaders, and stakeholders descriptive information on Center operations and progress as well as constructive feedback to guide continuous improvement.

## **Assessment of R.I.S.E. Up Implementation and Outcomes**

Today's Career Development Center has changed considerably since its start in March 2019. During the first year of operations, staff settled into functional workflow, established early internal processes and service protocols, and scaled up participant intake. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the physical space and forced staff to develop new workflow systems to collaborate with and serve a population of healthcare workers reeling from the many devastating effects of the pandemic. Despite these challenges to the fledgling program, R.I.S.E. Up leaders and staff adapted into a new, remote model that is now being considered for expansion across Michigan and perhaps additional states.

This section provides an overall assessment of R.I.S.E. Up implementation and outcomes based on qualitative data collected throughout the grant period and quantitative data reflecting Center operations from the time of the Center's launch in March 2019 through May 2021. It explores the reach and benefits of the Career Development Center during this time period by examining the number of participants served and their characteristics, key services provided by the Center, and employment and advancement outcomes for participants. It also provides key evaluative

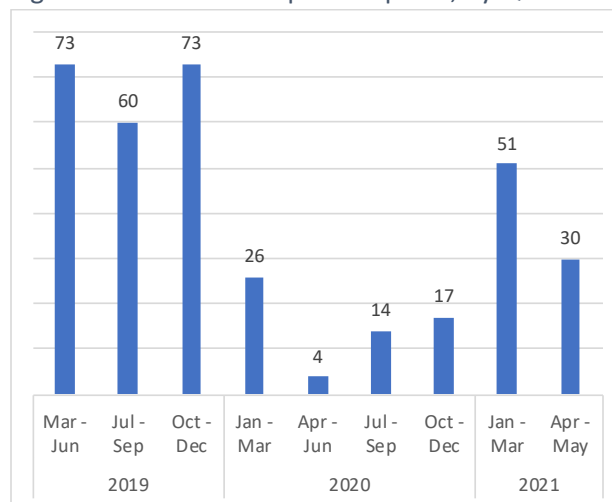
observations regarding R.I.S.E. Up implementation that have shaped its development over the course of the grant and that will continue to affect Center operations into the future.

### Reach of the Career Development Center

**The Career Development Center has worked with 348 R.I.S.E. Up participants through May 2021, with new participant engagements diminishing when the pandemic began in March 2020.**<sup>2</sup> Of these participants, 174

were Mercy Health colleagues and 174 were external job seekers – a coincidental exact 50/50 breakdown. As shown in Figure 1, new participant engagement started out strong, with more than 200 R.I.S.E. Up participants during 2019. New engagements tapered off notably in 2020 with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic. As the effects of the pandemic grew, job seeker and colleague capacity for job coaching and professional development dropped precipitously, and Coaches’ efforts shifted to supporting the

Figure 1: New R.I.S.E. Up Participants, by Quarter



Resource Navigator to address the growing need for support on unemployment related challenges with existing participants. From July through November 2020, the Mercy Health Career Coach was furloughed, and the remaining colleagues receiving coaching were transferred to the West Michigan Works Coach. As conditions began to stabilize in 2021, participation in the R.I.S.E. Up program regained momentum, with over 80 new participants beginning the program between January and May.

Although overall participant numbers are likely lower than they would otherwise have been absent a global pandemic, **the R.I.S.E. Up program is reaching a racially diverse population of participants, the majority of whom reside in the city of Grand Rapids, and nearly 40% of whom reside in a Neighborhood of Focus characterized by higher poverty and unemployment rates.**<sup>3</sup> As shown in Table 1, which provides demographic information for R.I.S.E. Up participants, 75% of participants are Grand Rapids residents, exceeding the program’s goal to have 50% of participants reside in the city.<sup>4</sup> In addition, and in alignment with the R.I.S.E. Up program’s focus

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of participants served in this report draws from program data received by the evaluation team through May 2021. As of August 25, 2021, the Center had served 375 R.I.S.E. Up participants. Job seekers or colleagues are counted as R.I.S.E. Up participants at time of intake when interest in and suitability for the R.I.S.E. Up process is determined by participant and Coach.

<sup>3</sup> Neighborhoods of Focus include 17 Grand Rapids census tracts identified by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which have greater poverty and unemployment relative to other areas in Grand Rapids. Source: [www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20190410.916306/full/](http://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20190410.916306/full/). Residence in one of five zip codes overlapping with the 17 Neighborhoods of Focus census tracts is used to proxy for residence in a Neighborhood of Focus.

<sup>4</sup> R.I.S.E. Up Proposal (2018). The SOURCE.

on racial equity, 57% of participants are non-white, whereas by comparison only one-third of residents in the City of Grand Rapids as a whole is non-white.<sup>5</sup>

Although there are similarities between colleagues and job seekers in terms of key demographics – for example, both groups of participants are largely female which is reflective of the healthcare industry in general, and both groups are in their mid-thirties – **there are notable differences between the two key groups served by the R.I.S.E. Up program, with job seekers representing a more racially diverse and a more economically disadvantaged population compared to colleagues.** In other words, the Center’s mission of serving both incumbent workers at Mercy Health *and* those seeking employment in entry-level positions through collaboration with West Michigan Works is central to the equitable reach of the R.I.S.E. Up program.

Compared to colleagues, a much higher proportion of job seekers are African American (45% vs. 29%) and have dependent children living in the household (49% vs. 39%).<sup>6</sup> Job seekers are also more likely to live in the Grand Rapids area compared to colleagues (84% vs. 66%), and job seekers are more likely to live in a Neighborhood of Focus characterized by higher poverty and unemployment rates (46% vs. 28%). Differences between colleagues and job seekers are also notable in terms of educational and economic characteristics, with 50% of job seekers reporting no postsecondary education beyond high school, compared to 32% of colleagues.

Employment trends are similarly disparate, with 56% of job seekers unemployed and only 21% working full-time as of their first interaction with the Career Development Center; in comparison, colleagues by definition are all employed, and 85% of them were working full-time as of their first interaction with the Center. These pronounced differences in employment characteristics are aligned with income and benefits data, which show that relative to colleagues, job seekers have approximately half of the average household income (\$24,896 versus \$43,317) and nearly three times the rate of public benefits receipt (55% versus 20%). Given that one-half of job seekers indicate having at least one child at home, a \$24,896 annual income would put a family of three not far above the federal poverty rate.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/grandrapidscitymichigan>

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, any differences between participant groups highlighted in the narrative are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, source: [aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines](https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines)

Table 1: RISE Up Participant Characteristics

	Colleagues	Job Seekers	Total
	n=174	n=174	n=348
Age (mean)	34	36	35
Female	86%	90%	88%
Children in household	39%	49%	44%
Race / Ethnicity			
African American	29%	45%	37%
Hispanic	14%	14%	14%
White	54%	32%	43%
Other	3%	9%	6%
Grand Rapids resident	66%	84%	75%
Neighborhood of Focus	28%	46%	37%
Education level			
High school	32%	50%	41%
Some college or job training	26%	21%	23%
Associate's degree	17%	13%	15%
Bachelor's or higher	25%	16%	21%
Employment status (baseline)			
Unemployed	n/a	56%	28%
Employed part-time	15%	22%	19%
Employed full-time	85%	21%	53%
Household income (mean)*	43,317	24,896	34,133
Mean wage (if employed)	\$15.93	\$12.67	\$14.98
Public benefits receipt (any)	20%	55%	37%
Medicaid	16%	49%	33%
SNAP	9%	33%	21%
Childcare assistance	4%	6%	5%

*\*Included in these averages are 32 job seekers and 6 colleagues who reported \$0 household income*

### Services Provided by the Career Development Center

As noted above, core R.I.S.E Up services include individualized career coaching guided by an Evidence-Based Career Pathways model as well as personalized, wrap-around supports to assist job seekers and colleagues in addressing a variety of barriers to employment or advancement.

Among the 348 participants served by the Center through May 2021, 82% have been “actively coached”, an important threshold established by Center staff to indicate that participants have worked with Career Coaches to complete key steps of the career pathway process that include analyzing and discussing interests, job fit, and assessments. This step is considered a critical milestone by R.I.S.E. Up staff, and Career Coaches reported investing a notable amount of time with participants exploring job options based on assessment results. Importantly, rates of active coaching are consistent for both job seekers and colleagues.

“I really like the test that shows you your top jobs. It was nice to see my traits match with the career I’m going for. The assessments showed me my weaknesses and my strengths, and my Coach helped me think about how to turn those weaknesses into strengths.”  
–R.I.S.E. Up Participant

In addition, **the Resource Navigator has worked with 38% of all R.I.S.E. Up participants to resolve barriers, with transportation, education, and housing being the most commonly identified barriers.**<sup>8</sup> Colleagues were much more likely to have received Resource Navigator assistance (47%) compared to job seekers (30%). As shown in Table 2, the most frequent barrier faced by participants as a whole was transportation, with 39% receiving assistance with this barrier. Although transportation has been a commonly cited barrier since the Center opened, the coronavirus pandemic likely exacerbated the impact of transportation, and other barriers, as public transportation options were limited or temporarily shut down. Education and housing assistance were also relatively common barriers faced by 38% and 29% of those working with the Resource Navigator, respectively. Although the difference between groups is not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ , education was a more commonly identified barrier for colleagues compared to job seekers; colleagues may be more likely to explore educational opportunities to facilitate their career advancement within Mercy Health. The Center’s Resource Navigator spends considerable time discussing and resolving R.I.S.E. Up participant barriers, with a median value of 145 minutes spent per participant. Across all participants meeting with the Resource Navigator, approximately one-half met with the Resource Navigator in-person. This overall rate of in-person engagement is lower because of the pandemic, when in-person contacts stopped almost entirely; in 2019, approximately three-quarters of those working with the Resource Navigator on a barrier met in-person, whereas in 2020 and 2021 this proportion dropped to below 5%.

“I met with [my Coach], and we explored where I wanted and needed to be. I needed to go to school, but funding school was challenging. [The Resource Navigator] helped me get funding and even helped with childcare. It was a blessing!”  
–R.I.S.E. Up Participant

To assist participants in overcoming barriers to employment and advancement, the R.I.S.E. Up initiative also has access to financial resources for specified purposes. As shown in Table 2,

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<sup>8</sup> With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the Center’s Resource Navigator extended services to Mercy Health colleagues across the state, including those who are not R.I.S.E. Up participants but who may eventually become participants. Although not included in R.I.S.E. Up participant counts, as of May 2021 the Resource Navigator has assisted an additional 78 colleagues in resolving one or more barriers to career advancement; 23 of these colleagues were also granted financial assistance.

nearly one-quarter of R.I.S.E. Up participants received financial resources through the program to assist with a barrier, with a median of over \$1,000 provided across participants receiving funds, and with colleagues receiving about twice the median value in funds compared to job seekers. The Support Fund – used to help participants with general employment barriers not covered by public assistance or community partners, such as transportation, childcare, or housing – is the most commonly received financial support, serving 20% of colleagues and 14% of job seekers. R.I.S.E. Up Training Funds used to support education and training is the second most commonly-received fund, received by 13% of colleagues and 9% of job seekers.<sup>9</sup> Among participants that received financial resources, colleagues received about twice the median value (\$1,206) compared to job seekers (\$669).<sup>10</sup> This difference in total funding amount is driven by colleagues’ eligibility for Mercy Health tuition assistance to pursue an associate’s, bachelor’s, or master’s degrees. While job seekers are not eligible for this tuition assistance, they are eligible for smaller amounts of funding to support short-term training or certification (e.g., a two-week certified nursing assistant program) required for application to certain Mercy Health roles.

Table 2: Resource Navigator Services and Resources Received

	Colleagues n=174	Job Seekers n=174	Total n=348
Received Resource Navigator assistance	47%	30%	38%
Barriers faced among participants working with RN			
Transportation	37%	42%	39%
Education	43%	29%	38%
Housing	28%	30%	29%
Food assistance	19%	29%	23%
Financial literacy	22%	8%	17%
Clothing	7%	15%	11%
Health	11%	12%	11%
Utilities	7%	15%	11%
Percentage meeting with RN in-person, among those working with RN	44%	52%	47%
Minutes spent by RN on barriers, per participant (median)	155	130	145
Ever received any financial resources	27%	20%	23%
RISE Up support funds	20%	14%	17%
RISE Up training funds	13%	9%	11%
Total amount of financial resources received (median)	\$1,206	\$669	\$1,048

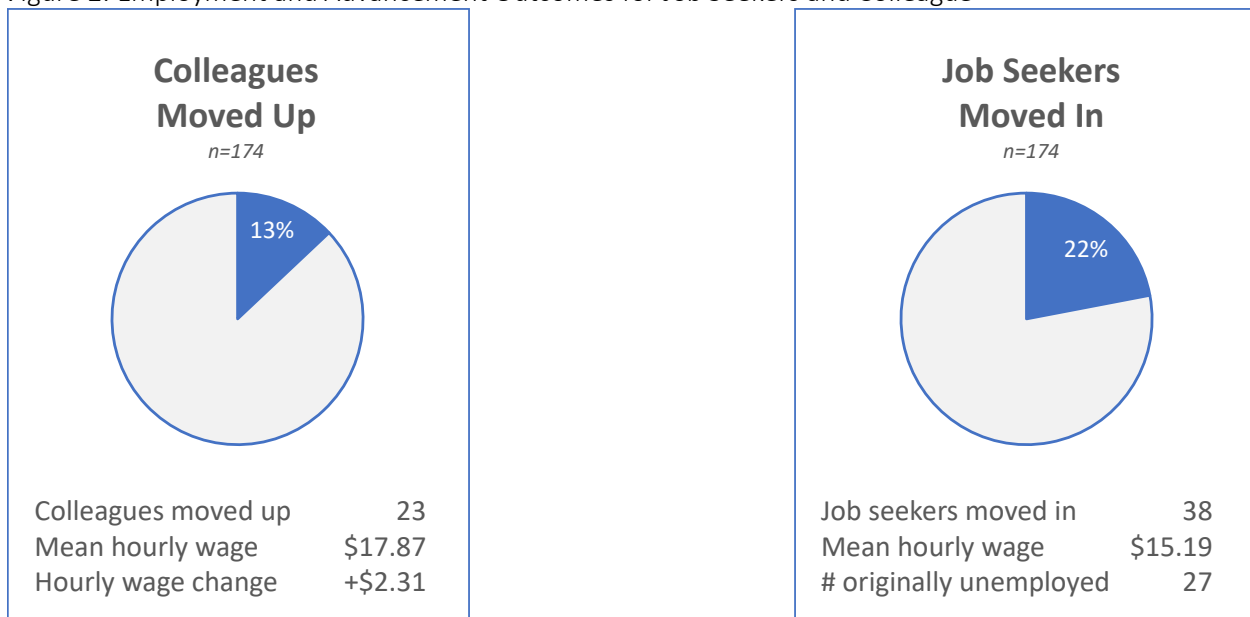
<sup>9</sup> R.I.S.E. Up Training Funds includes supports provided through Training fund and Testing/Credentials fund.

<sup>10</sup> Differences between job seekers and colleagues in the total amount of funds received is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . While notable, differences between job seekers and colleagues in the likelihood of fund receipt is not statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

## Outcomes for R.I.S.E. Up Participants

The primary goal of the R.I.S.E. Up program is to facilitate employment and career advancement for prospective and current healthcare employees in the Grand Rapids area, helping external job seekers “move in” to a position at Mercy Health and helping current Mercy Health colleagues “move up” or advance to a desired position within the organization. **As of May 2021, 18% of all participants served through the Center (61 of 348 individuals) achieved a successful employment or career advancement outcome, with an average of approximately five months between the time of first interaction with the Center to a successful outcome.** As shown in Figure 2, of the 174 colleagues served by the Center through May 2021, 23 (13%) advanced their career within Mercy Health, increasing their average wage by \$2.31 per hour from a starting average wage of \$15.56 per hour. This represents a 15% hourly increase, or an increase of roughly \$4,800 annually for a full-time employee at 40 hours per week. Similarly, of the 174 job seekers served by the Center to date, 38 (22%) secured employment at Mercy Health.<sup>11</sup> More than two-thirds (27) of these “move-ins” were unemployed when they first interacted with the Career Development Center; the average wage of the 38 job seekers moving into employment at Mercy Health was \$15.19.

Figure 2: Employment and Advancement Outcomes for Job Seekers and Colleague



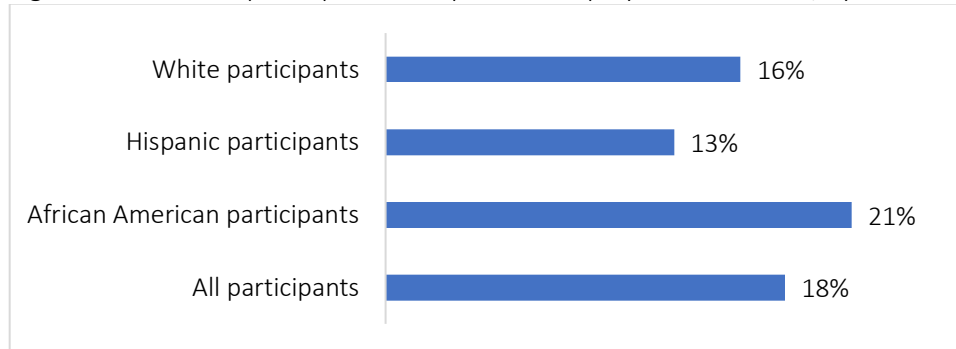
Although causality cannot be assumed, it is important to examine the relationship between core R.I.S.E. Up services and positive program outcomes. Notably, **participants who reached key coaching milestones or who engaged with the Resource Navigator were more likely to achieve positive employment and advancement outcomes.** For participants who worked with the Resource Navigator to resolve a barrier, 28% achieved a positive program outcome, compared to

<sup>11</sup> Three participants both moved in *and* then moved up since their first interaction and are counted as “moved in” for this analysis.

11% of participants who did not meet with the Resource Navigator. Additionally, 21% of participants assessed as “actively coached” went on to have a positive program outcome compared to less than 2% of participants that did not meet this key coaching threshold. These relationships suggest that R.I.S.E. Up program services are effective in helping job seekers gain better employment and colleagues advance at Mercy Health.

Given the R.I.S.E. Up program’s focus on racial equity, it is also important to disaggregate outcomes for key racial and ethnic groups. **Disaggregation of results by race and ethnicity suggests the R.I.S.E. Up program is serving Black participants equitably, and that outcomes for Hispanic participants can be improved.** Among Black participants served through the Center, 21% achieved a successful employment or career advancement outcome, compared to 16% for White participants and 13% for Hispanic participants. Although differences in outcomes among these three groups are not statistically significant, they provide an important indicator for the Center to consider as it moves forward.

Figure 3: Percent of participants with positive employment outcome, by race and ethnicity



The primary outcomes being assessed for the R.I.S.E. Up initiative are related to employment. However, Career Coaches report that many participants aren’t initially qualified for their employment or career advancement goals. In these cases, Center staff connected participants with training and education opportunities. Given that approximately two-thirds of participants have no postsecondary degree, there is significant potential for training and education support to meaningfully impact participants’ future employment opportunities. Among participants, 19% of colleagues and 3% of job seekers served by the Center subsequently enrolled in education or training toward their career goals. Given the time investment necessary to complete these credentials, any career advancement associated with this training is expected to take longer to manifest.

“Sometimes I would apply for jobs, but they would ask for qualifications I didn’t have. [My Coach] told me that all of my qualities were there, I just needed to be more confident and go for it, and we went through the [R.I.S.E. Up] steps together. [My Coach’s] words of encouragement did impact me, it made me feel more confident. I went into my interview like, ‘I got this!’”  
–R.I.S.E. Up Participant



## Evaluative Observations on R.I.S.E. Up Implementation

Underpinning the provision of participant services and support for professional advancement are important organizational, operational, and attitudinal implementation factors that have shaped the evolution and effective functioning of the Career Development Center. The observations below summarize the most critical implementation factors which have shaped the Center into its current form and will have implications for the future of the R.I.S.E. Up program.

**COVID-19 exacerbated challenges for colleagues and job seekers and forced staff to introduce a remote model for participant engagement. As remote engagement is being considered as a possible model moving forward, there are important potential downsides to consider.** With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Career Center quickly closed its in-person space and the Resource Navigator and Career Coaches began engaging participants remotely via phone, email, and video chat. With the rollout of vaccines for many hospital staff in 2021, Career Center activities reverted back to their pre-pandemic services, but in a remote capacity. This remote model is being considered as a default model moving forward as it lowers barriers to Career Center engagement for some participants. While this is a meaningful benefit, several Career Center staff and participants interviewed acknowledged that it can be harder to develop trust and relationships over phone or video calls, which could create barriers to service delivery, especially for newer participants who may be hesitant to share sensitive personal information with a stranger. In addition, and as discussed in more detail below, remote delivery can also pose problems related to participants' access to and use of the technology required to engage in the R.I.S.E. Up process.

"I liked meeting with [the Coach and Navigator in-person] because they made it fun, I got to see their facial expressions. [Switching to] phone was okay because I had already met them in-person. If it was completely over the phone I probably wouldn't have continued. I don't talk with others freely about my personal issues."  
—R.I.S.E. Up Participant

**The SkillsFirst platform, which guides Coaches and participants through the R.I.S.E. Up process, should prioritize increasing user accessibility as it continues development.** Over the course of the grant, the SkillsFirst platform has been continuously developed and improved by ThinkOptimal to serve the needs of Career Coaches as well as the participants they serve, and Center staff have expressed appreciation for ThinkOptimal's responsiveness and adaptability in making real-time adjustments to improve the user experience. However, developing a software program alongside the implementation and refinement of the R.I.S.E. Up program inevitably creates challenges for Coaches and participants, as all parties need to continuously learn and adjust to improvements to the platform. Since the introduction of the SkillsFirst platform through the most recent June 2021 evaluation site visit, Coaches and program participants have expressed that the SkillsFirst platform can still be difficult to navigate for some participants, especially those without ready access to a computer or laptop, and those with low technology skills. Continuing to make the platform and user interface straightforward, and mobile-friendly, can reduce participants barriers to access, especially as the program continues in a remote format.

**Career Center Coaches would benefit from additional opportunities to learn about the departments, teams, and jobs to which they refer participants.** Feedback gathered during interviews suggests that Coaches need better information about the jobs to which they're referring participants. Coaches rely on assessment software and basic information about jobs available at Mercy Health before providing guidance and coaching to participants, and for some, making a referral to talent acquisition staff who oversee certain job families. Coaches noted that having access to better information about the jobs to which they're referring program participants could help them create better matches between referrals and successful placements. Providing additional information to Coaches and connections to learn from talent acquisition staff about the needs and job conditions across departments, teams, and titles will be an important improvement for both the existing Career Center as well as future programs.

**The SOURCE, Mercy Health, and West Michigan Works have developed effective collaboration processes over the course of the grant and continue to innovate on their service model.** In the first year of Career Center operation, there was a strong emphasis on establishing common processes, workflows, and precedent for how to make support and referral decisions. This development phase was particularly challenging because the program is implemented and operated by three partnering organizations that shared a common overarching goal of serving job seekers and colleagues, but varied in their specific interests, priorities, and norms. Over time, the three organizations and their respective staff have settled into effective decision-making and workflow systems, and have begun documenting the Centers' standard operating procedures (SOPs) with the guidance of Mercy Health leadership. These SOPs codify institutional knowledge and process, which allows the Center to adapt when staff come and go and paves the way for program expansion and development at other locations. In addition to capturing practices in SOPs, Center staff are introducing innovations such as their recent piloting of group coaching sessions as a way to serve more participants simultaneously in a collaborative setting. Additionally, Coaches have begun engaging with Mercy Health colleagues who apply for a promotion but are unsuccessful, coaching and advising them on how to be more successful in their next application. Standardizing effective practices and piloting new ones are effective ways to increase program sustainability, scalability, and continuous improvement.

**Although process challenges have progressively dissipated, resource challenges persist.** As Center collaboration becomes more seamless and better defined, partner challenges are

"I've had both [virtual and in-person engagements]. The first time it was good to be in-person to get to know [the Center staff], to not have the distraction of my kids, and to build that relationship. But the second time, since I already had that relationship, virtual was okay."  
—R.I.S.E. Up Participant

increasingly centered around resources and funding. Namely, which partners will cover the costs of staff and infrastructure (e.g. physical space, equipment, SkillsFirst platform development and maintenance, etc.) for the current Career Center or for new programs created elsewhere? And how will the current mix of coaching and navigation support for colleagues and job seekers be maintained or changed as the program looks to expand beyond Grand Rapids? These negotiations are ongoing and will have important implications for which partners remain involved, which

services will continue to be offered to participants, and whether the program will take place in-person, remotely, or via a hybrid model.

## Considerations for the Future of the R.I.S.E. Up Program

As partner organizations continue to discuss the future of the R.I.S.E. Up program, including the method of service delivery and the possibility of expanding the model to other locations, observations from this evaluation offer several considerations.

As the remote service model is increasingly favored by program leaders, **attention should be focused on how to develop trust and relationships remotely, and how to create an accessible and mobile-friendly user experience for those who lack necessary electronic equipment or the technical skills required to navigate the career coaching platform on their own.** Continuing to explore, communicate about, and improve the SkillsFirst user experience, including streamlining the user interface and making the program accessible from many devices, can help lower participant barriers to engagement. As of summer 2021, Career Center Coaches were developing and piloting participant instructional videos which could help participants navigate the SkillsFirst platform.

**The continued development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will aid in the stability and institutional memory of the current R.I.S.E. Up Career Development Center at Mercy Health and can serve as a critical resource to others interested in replicating the program elsewhere.** In addition to capturing important process and workflow details of the Center, the current SOPs also cover promising practices and guidance on how to engage participants in a way that demonstrates respect and facilitates trust. This holistic approach to SOP development is extremely important for designing a program that serves participants equitably, and the codification of Center processes and engagement approaches will support the continued success of this and future Career Centers.

**Continuing to examine differences between job seekers and colleagues, as well as racial and ethnic differences in participant services and outcomes, will be critical to future equity-focused improvements to the program model.** The Center's current mission of coaching and removing barriers for job seekers in addition to incumbent workers is key to the equitable reach of the program, given that job seekers are more racially diverse and economically disadvantaged than colleagues. However, program data suggests that job seekers are less likely to engage with the Center's support services and receive less financial support. Despite lower service uptake, job seekers are more likely to have attained a positive outcome (employment) compared to colleagues (career advancement). In addition, evaluation results suggest that the Center is doing a good job helping Black R.I.S.E. Up participants reach their employment and advancement goals compared to other groups, whereas fewer Hispanic participants appear to be benefitting from Center services. Disaggregating and analyzing participant service and outcome trends like these allow staff and stakeholders to understand and act upon important equity-related themes.

The Mercy Health Career Development Center offers employers, non-profit partners, and other stakeholders an innovative case study in how to bolster traditional systems of career coaching, talent recruitment, and retention. As development continues, this program can assist Mercy Health to efficiently place and advance participants as opportunities arise, as their skills develop through coaching and training, and as their employment and advancement barriers are alleviated.