

EVALUATION OF GENERATIONS INCORPORATED'S EXPERIENCE CORPS PROGRAM

RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS



Over a single school year, students with Experience Corps tutors made over 60% more progress in learning two critical reading skills than similar students not served by the program.



ABOUT THE STUDY

In 2009 Washington University released the results of a two-year study that evaluated the impact of the Experience Corps program, a national program that engages people over 55 in helping struggling students learn to read, and its effectiveness on improving reading abilities in students.

The study examined 23 schools and 467 Experience Corps members in Boston, New York City and Port Arthur, Texas. At the beginning of the school year, teachers referred students who needed assistance with reading. Parental consent to participate in the study was obtained for 810 (81%) of those referred. All students were tested at the beginning and end of that academic year to measure phonemic awareness, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and teachers' perception of students' reading skills. Data for the study was collected from three different sources: through interviews with the students, assessments completed by teachers, and school records.

RESULTS FOR STUDENTS & EXPERIENCE CORPS MEMBERS

- Students tutors made over 60 % more progress in learning two critical reading skills, sounding out new words and reading comprehension, than students in a control group.
- As an intervention, Experience Corps compares to smaller class size. Students with Experience Corps tutors get a boost in reading skills equivalent to the boost they would get from being assigned to a classroom with 40 percent fewer children.
- Experience Corps works for all students, including those farthest behind. Similar results were reported for students regardless of gender, ethnicity, grade, classroom behavior or English proficiency. Half of all students referred to Experience Corps tutors struggle so much with reading that they are at or below the 16th percentile nationwide.
- Teachers welcome Experience Corps and overwhelmingly rate it as beneficial to students, while reporting that it represents little or no burden to them.

BENEFITS FOR OLDER ADULTS

- Experience Corps members experienced a significant decrease in both levels of depression and functional limitations while the comparison group increased in both categories over a two-year period.
- Both the comparison group and the Experience Corps group reported a decline in health over the two-year study period, but the Experience Corps members reported significantly less decline, suggesting that the program postpones age-related loss of health.
- About two-thirds of the least active members reported that they became significantly more physically active and more engaged in social and community events.
- 84% of members report that their circle of friends — a key measure of social well-being, particularly for aging adults — increased as a result of their involvement in the program.