

Youth development program helps kids get out of poverty in adulthood

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A free youth development program serving Black children and teens living in a low-income segregated community demonstrated positive long-term educational and financial outcomes in its alumni, according to a study from Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

A 33-year follow-up revealed that alumni graduated from college at twice the rate of their peers who did not participate in the youth development program. For each year of program enrollment, alumni were 10 percent more likely to complete college. Alumni also were more likely to save money at the end of the month and to report a better standard of living than their parents.

"Our study shows that a relatively simple intervention can interrupt the cycle of generational poverty, especially when youth spend years in the program," said lead author Karen Sheehan, MD, MPH, Medical Director of Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities at Lurie Children's and Professor of Pediatrics, Medical Education, and Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Dr. Sheehan also in the former Board President of the Chicago Youth Programs and the Medical Director of the clinic associated with it.

Dr. Sheehan co-founded the Cabrini Green Youth Program with Joseph DiCara, MD, a hospitalist at Lurie Children's and the senior author on the study, when both were medical students. Since then, what is now called Chicago Youth Programs, has grown into an organization serving youth and families in at least 30 of the city's 50 wards.

The programs offer [recreational activities](#) in a safe, nurturing space, as well as reading, tutoring, college preparation, career counseling and a medical clinic. Participants usually spend 8 to 10 years in the program.

"Forming [long-term relationships](#) with caring adults outside of the family creates a strong stabilizing force for the children in our program, and the impact of those social connections is remarkable," said Dr. Sheehan, who holds the Arnold-Gorter Family Professorship in Healthy

Communities. "Our results demonstrate that this approach is effective, even despite all the structural challenges [youth](#) face growing up in poverty and plagued by neighborhood violence. We can make a huge difference in children's lives just by being there for the long haul."

More information: Karen Sheehan et al, Long-term effects of a community-based positive youth development program for Black youth: health, education, and financial well-being in adulthood, *BMC Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-022-13016-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13016-z)

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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