

What is the community challenge?

The Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN), a community initiative was awarded subgrantee funding from GTCUW and Generation Next to partner with The Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD) to implement the Sankofa reading program at its partner schools to close the achievement gap in reading skills among elementary-school students in African and African-descended communities in the SPPN boundaries.

What is the promising solution?

Sankofa is a culturally-based literacy tutoring program for children of African descent designed to increase reading skills, increase independent guided reading levels, and improve academic performance. The program consists of comprehensive after-school tutoring with strong reading and cultural components.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund (SIF)

Intervention: Network for the Development of Children of African Descent's (NdCAD) Sankofa Program

Grantee: Greater Twin Cities United Way

Subgrantee: Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN)

Focus Area: Youth development

Focus Population: Kindergarten through third-grade children of African-descent enrolled in elementary schools or living in the SPPN boundaries with low reading scores.

Community Served: Greater Twin Cities Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN

What was the purpose of evaluation?

This report presents an evaluation of Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD)'s Sankofa program implemented in the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) from spring 2013 through fall 2017, with a particular focus on the third and fourth years, school years 2015 – 2016 and 2016 – 2017, of the SIF. The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota began the evaluation in 2013 and finished reporting in 2017. This evaluation included an implementation evaluation and an impact evaluation of preliminary and moderate evidence. Assessment of implementation fidelity was carried out to ensure that the core components of Sankofa took place. The preliminary evidence impact evaluation utilized a one-group pre-post design, and descriptive analyses were carried out on pre- and post-program performance of participants on a standardized reading assessment. The designs for moderate evidence utilized an interrupted time series (ITS) design and propensity score matched (PSM) comparison to assess the effects of Sankofa on reading ability using progress monitoring assessments developed by FastBridge Learning (FBL) and a statewide standardized reading assessment. Research questions examined potential effects of the program on several external reading outcomes, including scores on standardized assessments, soft grade-level reading targets, and other reading indicators. Parents also reported on changes in their children's behaviors and attitudes on reading and school.

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of Greater Twin Cities United Way, Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood was assigned an independent evaluator, CAREI, to evaluate Sankofa.

- The preliminary impact evaluation design found 90 percent of Sankofa participants increased their reading performance on the DRA II by at least one reading level over the course of the program. The percent of students below the soft-target grade-appropriate reading level likewise decreased for all grades (K-3). These

findings from the preliminary evidence design, lacked a comparison group and suffered from limited internal validity (as the increase could have been caused by external factors or normative growth).

- The moderate evidence impact evaluation design found a significant effect of Sankofa on growth in reading for the Decodable Words assessment using an ITS design (moderate level of evidence design), but not for the Letter Sounds or Sight Word assessments. However, this effect for Decodable Words was not significant after correcting for multiple comparisons (suggesting this finding could have been obtained by chance) and it was not corroborated by the multiple imputation pooled analysis.
- For the exploratory matched-comparison design, in Years 1 and 2, there were no effects of Sankofa on MCA-Reading scores. In Years 3 and 4, a significant difference was found. On average, Sankofa participants were expected to score 7.25 points lower on the MCA than the non-Sankofa SPPS comparison.

Notes on the evaluation

The evaluation was not able to fully address all major threats to internal validity. As noted in the report, missing data was the largest threat to the evaluation's internal validity. Although multiple imputation was used to address missingness, because the variables included in the multiple imputation model were driven by availability and not by theory, analyses may have had limited statistical validity. For the interrupted time series analysis, it was difficult to identify prospective participants far enough in advance to assess them six weeks prior to the program and track them for six weeks post-Sankofa, resulting in incomplete data for every participant. Likewise, the evaluation could not compare Sankofa students to similar students who did not participate in Sankofa for most of the outcome variables due to difficulties identifying an appropriate comparison sample or obtaining outcome data from comparison group students or their schools.

How is GTCUW using the evaluation findings to improve?

The results of the evaluation generated several recommendations for how the program might be strengthened to improve recruitment, enrollment and attendance procedures, as well as data collection strategies.

- As the number of homeless or highly mobile Sankofa participants increases, it might be useful to develop a tutor training module focused on supporting these students.
- Consider adding home visits and developing strategies for former students/graduates and their families to remain connected to the program.
- Consider additional tutor trainings that focus on working with readers with varied skills given the range of reading abilities of participants entering Sankofa.
- Continue to develop an evaluation framework that identifies different types of outcome measures suited for tracking growth and individual student's progress that can validly measure program impact, and are practically feasible to implement. The framework should use data collected by the program or the evaluation to reduce reliance on external sources such as schools. If an ITS design is not feasible, alternative quasi-experimental designs such as regression discontinuity could be considered.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Several designs used including PSM and ITS quasi-experimental designs

Study Population: Kindergarten through third-grade children of African-descent enrolled in elementary schools or living in the SPPN boundaries.

Independent Evaluator: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors. **To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.**

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.