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PRESS RELEASE

Atlanta nonprofits and Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunities partner on impact evaluations of anti-poverty interventions

Notre Dame, IN (November 16, 2021) - The [Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities](#) (LEO) at the [University of Notre Dame](#) is partnering with Atlanta-based nonprofits to evaluate the impact of their services aimed at helping local residents thrive.

LEO matches researchers with social service organizations to conduct impact evaluations that identify the innovative, effective, and scalable programs and policies that help people move permanently out of poverty. The lab uses a [cohort model](#) to train groups of organizations in impact evaluations and then works with them to design, launch, and share learnings from their research studies.

[Goodwill of North Georgia](#) is one of the service providers in LEO's Atlanta cohort. Goodwill is evaluating the impact of its career services program with the goal of increasing employment, earnings, and take up of employer-sponsored benefits.

"We find a great deal of value in participating in third-party evaluations," said Jenny Taylor, vice president of career services at Goodwill of North Georgia. "This is even more the case when the third party has used a rigorous process following strong protocols. We want to know where we are strong and where we may have opportunity to be stronger. The people we serve are often vulnerable and teetering; we want to be sure we are delivering the best possible interventions that deliver the outcomes we intend. We very much look forward to working with LEO to build the evidence to know what works and what doesn't."

Four other Georgia-based service providers join Goodwill in the cohort:

[First Step Staffing](#) is studying how its IMPACT program—a comprehensive service to newly employed adults—helps increase job retention rates, wage growth, and housing stability.



[Gateway Center](#) assists those experiencing homelessness find a pathway to a job and is studying how its Workforce Development Program helps clients find stable employment, housing stability, and wage growth.

[Kidz2Leaders](#) strives to end generational incarceration and promote a life of self-sufficiency and is evaluating the impact that its Camp Hope summer camp for kids has on reducing criminal justice involvement and increasing educational achievement and housing stability.

[Next Generation Men and Women](#) offers a four-year mentoring program to students at Title 1 high schools in Atlanta and is studying the impact of this program on students' high school performance, graduation rates, and post-secondary attainment.

"The best part about working at LEO is getting to work with our service provider partners," said Professor David Phillips, lead researcher on the Kidz2Leaders project. "I am always humbled by their commitment to making a difference in the lives of people, building innovative programs, and wanting to use research to serve others."

This cohort positions Atlanta to identify local programs that are effective in helping adults, children, and families become self-sufficient. The research will contribute to a body of evidence that will be shared with service providers, philanthropists, and policymakers nationwide to change the landscape of how America tackles poverty.

Leaders from the five organizations attended a two-day workshop in early November to learn about impact evaluations and to prepare to develop their research studies. They will work with LEO's research team for the next 16 weeks to design a study of their intervention aimed at lifting people out of poverty. The research design process will culminate in a second workshop in March 2022 where the organizations will present their research study designs to an audience of academics, philanthropists, and poverty thought leaders. Following the workshop, each project will prepare to launch in the field.

"We are excited to see what unfolds in the next 16 weeks as we work hand-in-hand with these organizations to realize their dreams of building evidence around their good work," said Heather Reynolds, LEO's managing director. "And I am most excited to look back ten years from now and see what is different in our country because these five partners said 'yes!' to doing research."

LEO's Atlanta cohort is spearheaded locally by Ed Fisher, a 1983 Notre Dame graduate and founder and managing partner of [SouthPointe Ventures](#). Ed and his wife Lori are

supporting the initiative and leveraged their network of relationships built over the years they have lived in Atlanta to recruit the participating organizations.

“It is truly our pleasure to be a part of something this special and meaningful,” said Ed. “Our Atlanta community warmly welcomed Notre Dame to our city, and the November kickoff of this cohort went so well. It was great to meet the partners and feel their energy. And now the real work begins, and the true benefits will start to accrue with the studies of these agencies’ programs, with the shared goal of demonstrably improving the lives of those in poverty. I have no doubt Atlanta will be the better for it.”