



Climb Wyoming

Summary

Climb Wyoming (Climb) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1986 to help single mothers with low incomes achieve self-sufficiency through career training and job placement. Climb serves six locations across the state. The intervention consists of six to eight weeks of job training, followed by job matching and a six- to eight-week fully subsidized job placement. The program provides mental health services, referrals to supportive services, and life skills education to single mothers. Climb staff often work extensively with applicants to remove barriers before they accept them into the intervention and continue to support participants after they leave.

Funding source



Climb’s primary funding source is competitive grants issued by the Wyoming Department of Family Services to local community-based organizations funded by the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Other funding sources include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training grants, corporate and foundation grants, individual giving, and city or county funding.

Intervention description



Climb serves single mothers with low incomes with the aim of helping them achieve self-sufficiency through career training and job placement. It delivers three primary services at six sites across Wyoming:

1. Employment services, consisting of six to eight weeks of career training during which one day each week, a “Climb Day,” is dedicated to life and job skill development, and placement in a subsidized job
2. Mental health services, consisting of individual and group counseling
3. Wraparound services, consisting of referrals for applicants and participants to community partners for services such as child care, transportation, and housing assistance

Services provided



Case management; Employment retention services; Financial incentives; Health services (*Substance use disorder treatment and mental health services*); Soft skills training; Training (*Occupational or sectoral training*); Work and work-based learning (*Subsidized employment*); Work readiness activities (*Job development/job placement*)

Populations served

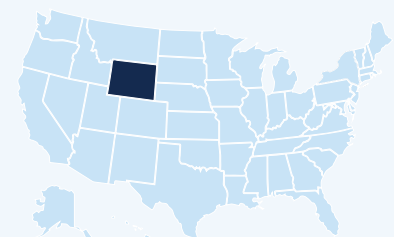


Climb serves single mothers who are eligible for Wyoming’s TANF program, legally authorized to work in the United States, and, as determined by Climb staff, unlikely to receive adequate help by a referral to another community or workforce development agency. Participants do not have to receive TANF or other forms of public assistance to enroll.

Setting



Climb Wyoming operates in 6 sites across the state, serving 13 of the state’s 23 counties. Sites include Cheyenne, Casper, Gillette, Laramie, and the Sweetwater and Teton areas.



Year first implemented

1986 (ongoing at the time of data collection)

What are case studies?

Case studies provide practitioners with information about innovative interventions that states, counties, community-based organizations, or other entities are undertaking to improve employment outcomes for TANF participants and other individuals with low incomes, especially public assistance recipients. **Case studies cover interventions not included elsewhere in the Clearinghouse because they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.**

Climb’s approach to services has two key features. First, across the three primary services provided by Climb, Climb staff deliberately try to provide a “psychologically-informed environment,” in which participants can safely practice effective communication, conflict management, and executive functioning skills, such as self-regulation and decision making. Climb staff model to participants how to be mindful when dealing with problems in personal and professional settings as well as appropriate ways to manage conflict and resolve issues. Another key feature of Climb is a guarantee of full-time employment for people who successfully complete the program. Climb offers to fully subsidize all job placements initially, and employers agree to keep participants on permanently unless there are irreconcilable problems.

Climb sites seek referrals from local organizations and advertise through local channels to recruit applicants. Main referral sources include state TANF and SNAP offices, health care providers, and local nonprofit organizations. Climb uses potential applicants’ existing relationships with partner organizations to introduce potential applicants to Climb. For example, TANF and SNAP applications in the areas Climb operates include a section on Climb and its services where applicants can indicate an interest in the program. This information is then shared with Climb staff for additional follow-up. According to Climb staff, common barriers that motivate applicants to apply include working in unstable, low-wage jobs; unhealthy relationships or experiences with domestic violence; health issues, including substance use disorders; and unreliable child care, housing, and transportation.

Each Climb site provides services to cohorts of participants, with a maximum of 12 participants in each cohort. Four of the Climb sites are small, offering the intervention to two cohorts a year. Two of the Climb sites are larger, offering the intervention to three cohorts per year. Climb staff work with applicants before assignment to a cohort, often for several months, to provide barrier reduction services to single mothers interested in participating. Staff aim to stabilize applicants’ housing, child care, transportation, and mental health supports to set them up for success. Those not accepted into a cohort initially can continue to work with Climb to reduce barriers and potentially enroll later.

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Staff have open conversations with applicants they do not select to help them understand why the program is not the right fit at that time. According to one staff member, “It’s not no, but not now.”

Climb provides three primary services:

(1) employment services, (2) mental health services, and (3) wraparound services.

1. Employment services. The employment services Climb provides consist of three primary components: career training customized to participant needs, life skills training through Climb Days, and job placement in an occupation related to the career training.

- **Customized career training.** Climb contracts with local training providers in each site to provide training in in-demand industries or occupations (for example, office careers; pipefitting; heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning; and certified nursing assistants). Staff mentioned that most of their trainers come from local community colleges; that they work with the instructors to customize the pace, content, and delivery of the training to participants’ education levels; and that they ask instructors to emphasize employment skill development. Climb sites select one training intervention for each cohort based on the demand for that occupation in their service area and the interests of applicants. The entire cohort participates in the same training together over a six-to-eight-week period. Participants attend four days per week, for eight or nine hours per day. Participants receive a \$25 gift card incentive for each day they attend training.
- **Climb Days.** Climb brings in contracted or volunteer facilitators and instructors to provide skill development activities on Climb Days, such as life skills instruction and parenting skills development. During Climb Days, Climb staff also directly provide job

skills workshops on topics such as resolving conflicts, managing time, accepting feedback, interviewing, completing a sample job application, and preparing a résumé. Participants receive a \$25 gift card for Climb Days they arrive to on time and attend in full. Climb Days occur during the career training portion of the intervention as well as the job placement phase.

- **Job placement.** After completing career training, participants are matched with a subsidized job placement. Staff work with participants to find an appropriate match by considering factors such as participant interests, strengths, and challenges identified during training; child care availability; physical skills or limitations; employer requirements; and expected wages and benefits. During this six- to eight-week job subsidy period, employers allow participants to continue to attend weekly Climb Days. During the placement, participants receive support from Climb staff and feedback from their employers about their performance. After the subsidized employment period ends, participants are expected to continue in their employment placement full time without any subsidy. The only exception is when the participant, Climb staff, and employer mutually agree the job is not the right fit for the participant. Climb staff have encountered difficulties engaging new employer partners who are willing to accept participants for placements. Staff reported it is particularly challenging when working with employers unfamiliar with Climb or who have negative views toward participants' need for mental health supports. However, working with new employers is necessary to continue finding job placements for all participants.

2. Mental health services. Individual and group counseling are required components of the Climb intervention. During Climb Days, each participant receives weekly group counseling as well as individual counseling every other week from a contracted, licensed mental health provider. Counseling sessions focus on communication skills, dealing with interpersonal conflict, and other barriers that can get in the way of success in the workplace. For individual counseling, participants are pulled out of a Climb Day activity for a 50-minute session every other Climb Day. Site staff, including the mental health

provider, determine which activity to pull each participant from weekly based on their strengths and challenges. All participants join in group counseling together with their cohort for 90 minutes each week.

3. Wraparound services. Climb refers applicants and participants to community partners for wraparound services, such as child care, transportation, and housing assistance. Within each site, Climb has developed informal relationships with organizations to provide these services. Referrals include food pantries, housing and homelessness organizations, legal aid, community health clinics, county social services agencies, domestic violence organizations, local charitable organizations, and state TANF and SNAP offices, among others. When making referrals, staff include participants in the conversation with the partners. Staff view this engagement with partners as an opportunity for participants to practice communication, conflict resolution, and executive functioning skills within a supportive environment and build those skills for the future. Climb staff also provide post-intervention support through mental health referrals and advice on areas related to career growth, such as navigating raises and promotions and obtaining further education.

Climb has about 40 staff across its sites. In each of the program sites that deliver services and directly interact with participants, there is a program director, assistant program director, and contracted mental health provider. In addition, large sites have a business liaison and program coordinator. Climb employs staff that work to support service delivery and model integrity. Climb also employs staff in leadership roles who focus on helping other organizations learn from Climb's experience and implement features from Climb's model.

Climb has a formal training system for onboarding new staff. Trainings include foundational topics such as the psychologically-informed environment, creation of safety for participants, poverty, trauma, motivational interviewing, confidentiality, active listening, group facilitation, and the Climb model. The Climb model requires staff communication to be open and direct, nonjudgmental, and interactive, and to address conflict directly.

One consequence of the emphasis on open communication among staff and participants is that it creates an emotionally taxing environment. Staff reported that working so closely and openly with one another requires a large emotional investment and makes setting and maintaining professional boundaries with participants difficult. Maintaining boundaries is especially difficult in smaller communities in which Climb staff might frequently encounter participants outside the program.

As of 2020, Climb's annual budget is \$5 million. On average, services cost \$15,716 per participant (Climb Wyoming 2019).

Research on intervention to date



This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness. No evaluations of the Climb intervention have taken place; only descriptive analyses of outcomes and pre-post evaluations have been conducted. Climb staff track short- and long-term participant outcomes, such as graduation rates, employment rates, wage increases and maintenance, receipt of public assistance, and receipt of health insurance. In 2019, 95 percent of participants graduated from the program, and 92 percent of graduates were employed at the end of the intervention. Average monthly wages for 2019 participants rose from \$1,151 at application to \$2,327 three months post-intervention (Climb Wyoming 2019). However, these earnings differences cannot be attributed to Climb as other factors might explain the increase in wages.

A pre-post analysis of data provided by the Wyoming Department of Family Services suggests that the intervention saves the state of Wyoming about \$871,464 annually from decreased SNAP use among intervention graduates (Climb Wyoming 2019). A separate unpublished analysis by

the Wyoming Department of Health found Climb graduates were enrolled in Medicaid at or below rates of a similar group of Medicaid recipients across the state. However, these comparative pre-post analyses do not necessarily indicate that participation in Climb caused changes in outcomes. It is possible that other factors explain the differences that the analysis does not account for.

The intervention was selected as one of nine innovative interventions supporting the employment of people with low incomes. These interventions are described in a series of in-depth, descriptive case studies as part of the [State TANF Case Studies](#) project, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. The case study for that project documented information on the interventions Climb Wyoming offers, including populations served; funding; measurements of participant progress; and promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned. This information was obtained through a site visit, including observations of program activities and interviews with participants, staff, and leaders; document reviews; and a follow-up telephone call about how the program responded to the COVID-19 public health emergency (Eddins and Lyskawa 2021).

Case study information sources

The primary source of information for this case study was the State TANF Case Studies report described earlier, which collected information via a site visit in March 2020 and a telephone call in July 2020. The Pathways Clearinghouse shared a near-finalized draft of the case study with Climb and incorporated revisions for accuracy and completeness. For more information about the methods for selecting and developing the case studies, please see the Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies on the [Pathways Clearinghouse project page](#).

More information



More information on this intervention is available at <https://www.climbwyoming.org/>.

Climb Wyoming (2019). *2019 progress report*, Cheyenne, WY: Climb Wyoming. Available at <https://www.climbwyoming.org/progress-report-2019/>.

Eddins, K., and J. Lyskawa (2021). *Case study of an employment and training program serving single mothers with low income: Climb Wyoming*, Washington, DC: Mathematica. Available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-employment-and-training-program-serving-single-mothers-low-income-climb>.

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