Helping those least likely to navigate their way through the education necessary in a competitive job market has been Project Quest’s mission from the start.

A recently released report on a six-year randomized controlled study quantifies the group’s achievements. The study, the first of its kind for the program, tracked 200 participants for six years and found Quest had a major sustained impact on their earnings.

The findings are no surprise to those who have been in the trenches. Over the past quarter-century, Project Quest has seen success in raising the skill level of those at the bottom of the economic ladder in Bexar County.

However, individual stories do not provide an accurate portrayal of the overall effectiveness of the program. The lack of an independent analysis has sometimes invited skepticism.

Project Quest, which stands for quality employment through skills training, was launched in 1992 by Communities for Public Service/Metro Alliance, a church-based citizens group. Its budget this year is $5.6 million and is funded by the city of San Antonio, Bexar County, the state of Texas, the U.S. Labor Department and charitable foundations.
The study focused on 410 people who applied for the program between 2006 and 2008. Approximately half of those enrolled in the study were provided the usual training services offered by the program and half had to do without. Each group was tracked for six years.

The Economic Mobility Corp. conducted the study. “Quest not only increased its participants’ earnings; it enabled graduates to reach the middle class. Few workforce development programs have had as powerful an impact,” it found.

Participants in the study who received training were earning an average of $28,000 per year compared to $23,000 among those in the control group who did not receive any services.

Quest participants also reported less trouble paying for housing, fewer problems with overdue utility bills, and less worry about food running out.

The researchers noted Quest’s partnership with the Alamo Colleges, which provides the training for participants, as a contributing factor to its success.

Over the past 25 years, Quest has served more than 6,600 individuals, who tend to stay in the San Antonio area and work for local employers.

The study calls Project Quest “an excellent local economic development strategy.”

We agree.