

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT *Toolkit*



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Purpose of THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed for shelters, housing providers, youth-serving agencies and other organizations concerned about homeless and at-risk youth in Canada. It outlines some ideas for a youth employment project for at-risk youth and is designed to create a model that is flexible and adaptable. The case studies and resource materials are based on the Train for Trades program at Choices for Youth in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Groups are encouraged to consider this model as a promising practice but to modify it where necessary to create a program that fits the unique needs of their community. Whether groups are interested in adapting one part or the entire model, the toolkit provides support and resources to help develop the program, establish staffing roles, understand funding expectations and to create the policies, procedures and rules needed to get it up and running as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Please note: the information contained in the toolkit is accurate as of March 2015 but the programs are continually evolving to better meet the needs of the youth they serve.

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Thanks also to the community partners for their involvement in this toolkit and in the program overall.

- **Dennis Kendell** – Regional Operations Executive Director, Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation
- **Kelly Power** – Director, Carpenters Millwrights College

CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS/HOMELESS HUB

Thanks to the staff, students and volunteers at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub for their efforts in collecting and analyzing the material, transcription, review of materials and creation of the toolkit.

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CREATION *of the Toolkit*

As with most projects of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub the toolkit was developed through a very collaborative process.

- » A brief review of literature related to youth employment and social enterprise initiatives was conducted (this toolkit is not a literature review and this research was conducted primarily for background material).
- » Phone and in-person interviews (the latter were filmed) were completed with a variety of staff and participants of Choices for Youth (CFY), Train for Trades (T4T) and partner organizations.
- » Transcriptions were made of each interview.
- » CFY/T4T staff provided copies of their materials including policies, forms, guides etc.
- » All of the materials were analyzed to determine what information needed to be included in the toolkit.
- » The video interviews were edited to create approximately 10 short videos to help supplement understanding of the written content.
- » Each participant in the videos had the ability to review their contribution and confirm their acceptance of the video.
- » Key staff at CFY/T4T had an opportunity to review content of the written toolkit. Special thanks to Eddy St. Coeur and Rosalind Curran for their continual feedback.

How the Kit is ORGANIZED

We begin with an overview of youth homelessness and youth employment, as well as backgrounders on social enterprise, energy poverty and employment.

We then move into an overview and history of Choices for Youth. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the Train for Trades program including history, program and support elements, partners, funding and evaluation. We end with some lessons learned and recommendations for programs adopting a similar program. Additionally, Train for Trade recently underwent some changes to the way it is organized so these are all discussed and outlined.

“It’s a wonderful program. If anybody can adopt it and do it again, it’ll be a great thing to do for sure.”

—Ronnie O’Neill, Site Manager, Train for Trades

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Overview

Many different terms are used to describe young people who are homeless, including street youth, street kids, runaways, homeless youth etc. Youth homelessness refers to young people who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, and importantly, lack many of the social supports deemed necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, they do not have a stable or consistent residence or source of income, nor do they necessarily have adequate access to the support networks needed to foster a safe and nurturing transition into the responsibilities of adulthood. Few young people choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

There is no formally agreed upon age definition of a homeless youth (or in many cases, even a youth) in Canada. However, there is a [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#) that has received wide support from community groups, government and researchers. A youth definition of homelessness is in the process of being created. It will follow the Canadian Definition in terms of types of homelessness, while at the same time distinguishing the unique pathways that youth follow into homelessness.

Even within the proposed definition there is recognition that it is being created to help provide some definitional coherence despite not necessarily reflecting specific program, policy and jurisdictional definitions that already exist.

Depending on the jurisdiction, the state will define the ages for which child protection services are responsible for care, what kinds of mental health supports are accessible and the age when one can live independently, obtain welfare and other government benefits, or leave school, etc. (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 13).

The category of youth therefore can range from 12 to 29. According to the census *youth* means those aged 12-19, while *young adults* includes individuals between 20 and 29 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). A young person under the Youth Criminal Justice Act is someone over the age of 12 and younger than 18. Federally, the age of majority is considered to be 18 (when youth are allowed to vote) but in many provinces youth cannot buy alcohol until 19 years of age (Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta, 2013; Youthworks, 2009).

The child welfare mandate is determined by the provinces and territories and the age of protection ranges from under 16 to under 19. This means, for example, that youth leaving home or being removed from their home under these ages fall under the responsibility of the child welfare system. However, above these ages children can be “aged out¹” of foster care and restrictions may be placed on new entries. This is particularly true in Ontario where new access to the child welfare system is extremely limited for 16 and 17 year olds. A bill before the Ontario Legislature to address this issue died on the order papers before it could be approved into law (Justice for Children and Youth, 2013; Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2011).

Most youth homeless services in Canada provide supports beginning at 16 or 18 and continuing up to the youth’s 25th birthday (Youthworks, 2009). Age is an important consideration because the developmental needs of youth vary from those of adults, but also vary within the youth category itself. The “needs, circumstances, and physical and emotional development of a 14 year old compared to an 18 year old or a 23 year old [are different] (though it must also be acknowledged that the factors that produce and sustain youth homelessness – including violence, trauma and abuse, may also contribute to developmental impairment for older youth)” (Gaetz, 2014a, p. 13).

Over the course of the year the number of young people who become homeless in Canada is at least 40,000 and there may be as many as 7,000 homeless youth on any given night (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014).

The Government of Canada estimates 1 in 5 shelter users in this country are youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Males outnumber females by a ratio of 2:1 in most shelters (very little specific data is collected about trans* youth). Segaert reports that 63% of youth in shelters are male, and 37% are female. Because of violence encountered by young women on the streets they may be more likely than young males to access alternatives to shelters (Segaert, 2012; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

While only 20% of shelter users across the country are youth, [Choices for Youth](#) reports that youth make up 30% of the homeless population in St. John’s, Newfoundland (Choices website).

There is significant overrepresentation amongst homeless youth who identify as [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer or 2-spirited \(LGBTQ2S\)](#). They are estimated to make up 25-40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Abramovich, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

Additionally, as with the homeless adult population, there is significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, depending upon location there may be an increase in the number of homeless youth of colour (i.e. black youth in Toronto) (Springer, Lum, & Roswell, 2013; Baskin, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

1 Refers to the process of a child becoming independent and leaving the child welfare system. Many homeless youth have become too old to remain under the jurisdiction of the child welfare system and yet lack the necessary skills to live independently.

2 Trans* is an umbrella term that signifies the broad diversity of gender variance found within the transgender community including, but not limited to, transgender, transsexual, agender, bigender, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary etc.

Pathways into and out of homelessness vary. We know that over 40% of homeless youth have been involved with the child welfare system and over half of homeless youth have previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Additionally, homeless youth experience greater mental health issues (40-70% compared to only 10-20% for housed youth) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Gaetz, 2014a).

The key causes of youth homelessness, then, include a) individual / relational factors, b) structural factors and c) institutional and systems failures:

1. **Individual and Relational factors** - A main cause of youth homelessness is a breakdown or conflict in key relationships within the home. The vast majority have chosen or forced to leave an unsafe, abusive, neglectful or otherwise untenable situation. Many young people leave home because of mental health problems or addictions issues that either they or someone else in their household is experiencing.
2. **Structural factors** - This includes ongoing problems that a young person cannot control, and which largely originate outside of the family and exist at a broader societal level. This includes social and economic conditions like poverty, inadequate education, underemployment and lack of housing stability which may also frame the experience of young people and can underlie stressors within the family that can lead to conflict, meaning “home” is no longer a viable option. Discrimination in the form of homophobia, transphobia, racism and bullying can also be contributing factors.
3. **Institutional system failures** - Sometimes young people wind up homeless after having slipped through the cracks of the systems we put in place as “social safety nets” (such as child protection, health and mental health care, juvenile justice). Many young people in government care (child protection) wind up homeless when their placements break down leaving them without a place to live, or who choose to leave their placements; and/or have been discharged from a situation of care (e.g., for non-compliance) without a place of residence to which they can or will return. That we discharge young people from systems of care without adequate discharge planning and ongoing supports increases the risk of homelessness.

Homeless youth may be physically on the streets, staying in emergency shelters or youth hostels, “couch-surfing” with friends or family, renting cheap rooms in boarding houses or hotels, or staying in squats. All of these are risky housing situations, which may lead to imminent loss of shelter. Homeless youth, also tend to move between various housing situations over time as is outlined in the typology below which has been expanded from the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Gaetz argues that “it is the instability of their housing situation that characterizes their status as homeless youth”. (www.homelesshub.ca).

**"Becoming homeless
then *does not just mean a
loss of stable housing,
but rather leaving a
home in which they are
embedded in *relations of
dependence*"***

Youth homelessness is defined by inherent instability, profound limitations and poverty. At a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potentially trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 9).

Youth homelessness then must be considered separately from adult homelessness. Just as the pathways into homelessness are different so are the possible interventions and solutions. Homeless youth generally are leaving a situation – whether it is family, child welfare or correctional services – where they were dependent upon adult caregivers for their overall support.

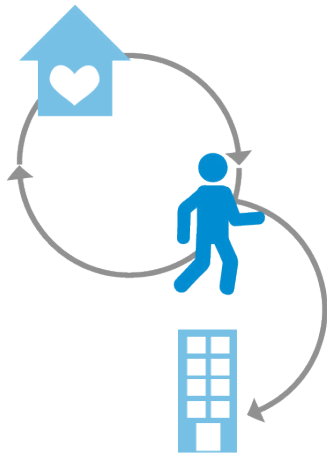
Becoming homeless then does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather leaving a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence, thus experiencing an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community (Gaetz, S., 2014a: p. 7).

The diversity of homeless youth notwithstanding, the lack of experience with independent living is an important factor. A critical component of this is the ability to achieve education and employment to provide a suitable level of income. This toolkit presents a model of employment for at-risk youth that can help them develop the life and job skills necessary to obtain further education or a decent job.



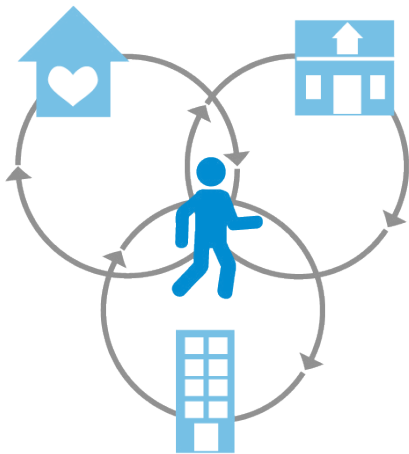
Matthew, a Tier 1 Train for Trades Participant, discusses life at The Lilly.

FIG.1 THE NAEH TYPOLOGY OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



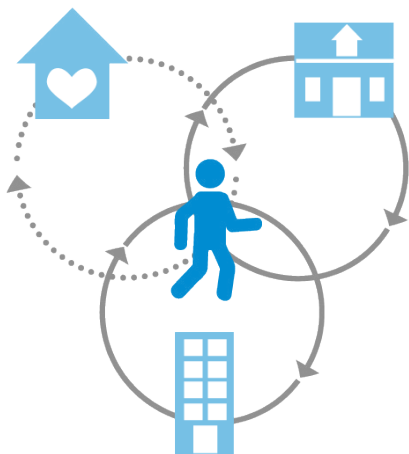
Temporarily Disconnected

As Kuhn and Culhane (1998) point out, the vast majority of people who become homeless do so for a very short time, typically find their way out of homelessness with little assistance and rarely return to homelessness. This is as true for adults as it is for youth. The NAEH suggests that between 81 and 86 percent of homeless youth fit into this category (NAEH, 2012). This group is characterized as generally being younger, as having more stable or redeemable relations with family members, a less extensive history of homelessness and are more likely to remain in school. There is a strong need for prevention and early intervention to divert this population from the homelessness system.



Unstably Connected

This population of homeless youth has a more complicated housing history and is likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness (Toro et al., 2011). They are more likely to be disengaged from school and will have challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Most will have retained some level of connection with family members and are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues than chronically homeless youth. This is a group for which family reconnection interventions, as well as transitional housing programs are recommended, particularly for youth under 18.



Chronically Disconnected

In terms of numbers, this will be the smallest group of homeless youth, but at the same time the group with the most complex needs with the heaviest reliance on the resources in the youth homelessness sector. This group is defined by longer term homelessness and a greater likelihood of repeated episodes. They will also be more likely to have mental health problems, addictions issues and/or a diagnosed disability. They will have the most unstable relations with families and in some cases there will be no connections at all. Young adults in this category may require more comprehensive interventions, as well as more supportive and longer-term housing programs.

(from Gaetz, 2014a).

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Backgrounder

Youth Unemployment Statistics

Youth employment, or more specifically, youth unemployment is an important issue for Canadians. In 2012, the youth (ages 15-24) unemployment rate was 14.3%. On average, according to Statistics Canada, youth unemployment nationally tends to be double the unemployment rate of adults (in 2012, adult unemployment was at 6%). In 2014, immigrant youth had even higher rates of unemployment (17.2%) compared to Canadian-born youth, with those more recently landed having higher rates than those who have been here for an extended period of time (19.5% for immigrant youth here five years or less versus 15.8% for immigrant youth landed 10 years ago or more) (Statistics Canada, 2015a; Statistics Canada, 2015b; Bernard, 2013).

Youth unemployment is also linked to education levels. The lower one's level of education the longer one tends to be unemployed and the higher the rate of unemployment is amongst that group (Marshall, 2012). There is a push in the market towards credentialism and a job that may have required a high school diploma 20 years ago now requires a university degree. In 2014, only 23.8% of youth with less than a Grade 9 education were employed compared to 63.7% of high school graduates and 71.8% of youth with a bachelor's degree (Statistics Canada, 2015b).

Youth tend to experience more frequent periods of unemployment (for example, lower seniority means they are laid off first) but on the more positive side, youth tend to be unemployed for shorter periods of time than adults. Additionally, more than a quarter of the unemployed youth in 2012 were youth who had never worked before and therefore lacked experience necessary to obtain a job (Bernard, 2013).

HOMELESSNESS AND YOUTH UN/EMPLOYMENT

With unemployment a significant issue amongst housed youth, it is no surprise that it is also a challenge for youth experiencing homelessness. While some of the issues are the same (lack of experience, lack of education), there are also unique challenges to maintaining employment presented by the lack of a permanent address. Research conducted by Raising the Roof with “nearly 700 youth experiencing homelessness in three Canadian cities found that 73% were not employed. Similarly, in a study with 360 homeless youth in Toronto, only 15% identified paid employment as their primary source of income” (cited in Noble, 2012, p.8).

In her report for Raising the Roof, Amanda Noble (2012) shares a number of barriers to employment for homeless and at-risk youth including:

- » not having basic needs met
- » a lack of social support
- » low education and skill levels (or social capital)
- » trauma
- » mental health concerns
- » addictions
- » criminal justice involvement

Noble also stated that “some employers are hesitant to employ youth once they find out they are homeless, perhaps due to the fear that their lives are not stable enough to maintain employment, or as a result of the stereotypes associated with homeless and at-risk youth” (cited in Noble, 2012, p.14).



Some former Train for Trades youth on the job.

Employment Programs for Youth

The best employment training programs are effective in that they meet their objective of improving the employability of marginalized youth by providing them with the supports necessary to transition into the world of work. (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013, p. 250).

There are numerous training and employment programs for unemployed youth, some of which specialize in at-risk or homeless youth. However, traditional employment programs and methods may not work for marginalized youth. Creating a program that supports and responds to the needs of at-risk or homeless youth means addressing some of the systemic issues that affect their participation in a program.

Some considerations:

- » Connect employment training with housing stability. Youth should be supported to find or maintain housing, either independently, with the same agency or through a community partner. However, there should be no risk of eviction if the youth fails to complete the training program.
- » Provide start-up costs including transportation, work clothing and necessary supplies/equipment.
- » Support the youth to obtain necessary identification.
- » Provide life skills training to assist the youth with development of practical skills that will serve them after the program is complete. In particular, obtaining a bank account and developing a budget, creating a resume, interview skills etc. are key for a youth employment program.
- » Offer intensive case management supports to assist the youth in dealing with issues that arise. This includes allowing time off (with pay) to attend to urgent matters such as court dates, counselling appointments etc.
- » Figure out a plan to address issues of lateness and attendance. These present particular challenges for street-involved youth who may not have the same ability to adhere to a structured routine as housed youth.
- » Build in access to education – especially a GED – if possible. This will help improve outcomes after the program for the young person. Support a young person's goals for future educational attainment. This could include discussing educational programs, assisting with applications and applying for scholarships.
- » Create opportunities for job shadowing/mentorship so that youth can see what a program looks like in a real world application.
- » Consider a weekly or bi-weekly pay schedule rather than monthly. This serves two functions:
 - › Youth do not have to wait as long between pay cheques, especially for those items that are deemed essential for work.
 - › Money is spread out over the month rather than arriving in one large sum (this does make budgeting for rent important however).

Promising Practices for Community Agencies

The report on the “[Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit](#)” highlighted several promising practices that had emerged for community agencies in engaging with private sector partners. These promising practices are included here, but the full report should be read for a more complete understanding.

- » Be upfront and honest with employers about the barriers homeless and at-risk youth face and the possible challenges they may encounter during the work placement. Encourage youth to be transparent with their employer as well.
- » Try and make sure that youth have the practical tools needed to succeed at their job placement. For example, make sure they have access to a phone and arrange a work placement in close proximity to where they are living. One organization used a “buddy system”: youth were paired up with a buddy who lived near them, and if they needed to contact their employer but did not have access to a phone they would ask to use their buddy’s cell phone.
- » Arrange weekly meetings with the youth in either a group or one-on-one setting once they have started their job placement. Go over any challenges they are having and brainstorm strategies and solutions, such as better time management. Emphasize the importance of being accountable to their employer and being on time.
- » Meet face-to-face with employers to discuss the opportunity of becoming partners and providing employment opportunities to youth. Share with them challenges, best practices, and success stories.
- » Meet with the employer during the youths’ work placement to see how it is going and provide support. Help to manage challenges the youth may be facing.
- » Promote pre-employment programs broadly using various communication outlets. Many employers are very interested in giving back to their community but do not know that these types of programs exist.
- » Community agencies should think creatively when developing jobs for youth. If a youth is particularly talented artist look into placements at art galleries or in marketing.

"The *best employment training programs* **are effective in that they meet their objective of improving the employability of marginalized youth by providing them with the supports necessary to transition into the world of work"**

– Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Backgrounder

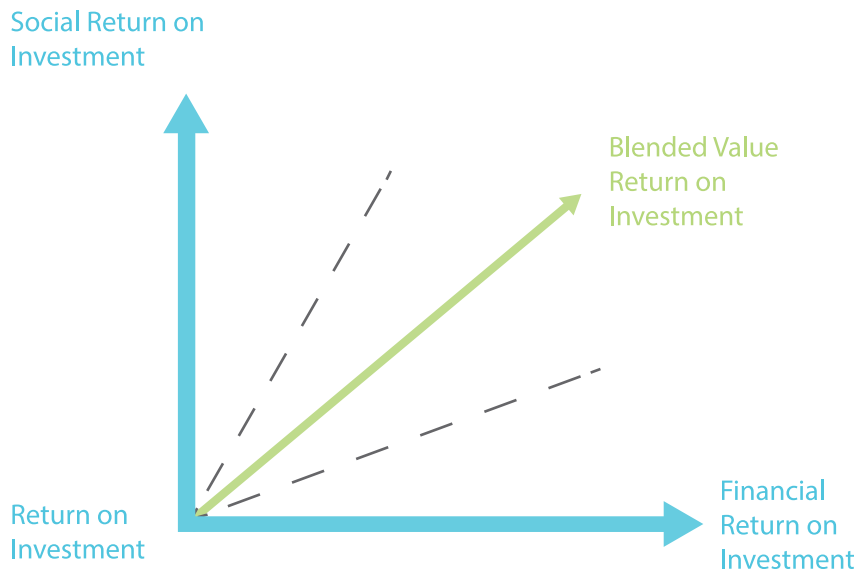
“The framework of social enterprise is often described as ‘people, planet and prosperity’ – social benefits and sustainable practices supported by entrepreneurial activities” (LOFT Youth Centre for Social Enterprise and Innovation).

To date, there is no agreed upon definition of social enterprise. The [Social Enterprise Council of Canada](#) defines a social enterprise as “businesses owned by nonprofit organizations, that are directly involved in the production and/or selling of goods and services for the blended purpose of generating income and achieving social, cultural, and/or environmental aims. Social enterprises are one more tool for non-profits to use to meet their mission to contribute to healthy communities” (Social Enterprise Canada, n.d.).

Although there is not a commonly agreed upon definition for a social enterprise, there are several shared key qualities:

- » Social enterprises are revenue-generating businesses, but focus on creating socially-related good.
- » They create impact and improvement in the areas of social, cultural, economic or environment sectors by using market-based principles.
- » Income/revenue generated by the business helps achieve the mission, which is the driving force of the work.
- » “Profits” are generally reinvested in growing the business or supporting other key projects. In all cases, social enterprises do not give money to shareholders or individuals as “profit” (employees are paid as part of the business plan).
- » They provide meaningful employment and training for individuals who may face barriers to employment.
- » The goal is to improve sustainability and decrease reliance on unstable sources of fundraising including grants, charitable donations and government funding.

FIG.2 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SEEKS BLENDED RETURN ON INVESTMENT



from Jed Emerson, [Blended Value](#)

Social enterprise can be thought of as combining social and economic values to achieve success. Unlike the traditional ‘return on financial investment’ used by the private sector, or the “social return on investment” used by the non-profit sector, social enterprise measures what Jed Emerson calls a ‘blended value bottom line’ (www.blendedvalue.org). That is, the return on investment is not financial or social but rather it is both at the same time.

Social enterprises in the community sector often hire people who have been marginalized from the mainstream job market. This could include people facing mental health or addictions issues, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, people experiencing homelessness/poor housing or youth. In addition to job skills, a social enterprise also tends to provide other support services, including life skills, counselling, etc.

“To me, a social enterprise is a business model, like any other kind of business model. But rather than the revenues going back into the pockets of the shareholders or the trustees, social enterprise is set up so that a portion or all of those funds and proceeds are funneled to offset some kind of social inequality or to provide supports to some areas in society that might be lacking or could benefit from having a resource.”
—Eddy St. Coeur, *Manager Social Enterprise, Choices for Youth*

While it may seem like a new concept, it is simply a new term for an old concept. “Thrift stores have been selling inexpensive household items and generating revenue for charities for over 100 years, YMCAs have operated hostels and fitness centres for decades; alternative businesses have employed people who live with a mental illness since the 1980s” (Toronto Enterprise Fund [website](#)).

There are a wide variety of social enterprise activities used in the community non-profit sectors, including arts and crafts, courier services, catering businesses, laundry services, print shops, restaurants, thrift stores etc.

ENERGY ISSUES *Background*

What is Energy Poverty?

Historically, energy poverty has referred to the way in which an individual in the Global South's overall well-being is negatively affected by the lack of access to fuel, including the use of high polluting fuels or the need to spend extensive amounts of time collecting fuel. Conversely, fuel poverty was used to describe people in the Global North who had the ability to access energy but the lack of resources to pay for it (Goulding, 2014).

In Canada however, these terms tend to be used interchangeably to refer to individuals who are unable to afford the energy/fuel needed to maintain their life, particularly as related to heating/cooling. Specifically, energy poverty is “defined as households that spend more than 10 percent of their income on home energy” (Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination). In 2011, it affected 1 million households in Canada, while those households in the lowest income bracket in Ontario averaged 12% spending on utilities (ibid).

In some communities, low-income households can apply for energy subsidies from their utility providers, municipality and/or province/territory. Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) provides energy subsidies to many of its tenants through the Heat Subsidy Program. This program tries to offset heating costs and the average subsidy is \$1,450/year. “NLHC has increased its emphasis on improving energy efficiency in units when regular modernization and improvement is ongoing. When units are made more energy efficient, the heat subsidy can go a lot further in helping tenants keep their homes warm throughout the year and improve overall housing affordability” ([NLHC Annual Report 2013-2014](#)).

What is Energy Retrofitting?

Energy retrofitting refers to the practice of improving a facility to make it more energy efficient. This can include a number of small fixes such as caulking windows, inserting covers on plugs, wrapping water pipes and weather-stripping doors. It can also include large-scale repairs such as improving the amount and type of insulation in walls and roofs.

The Train for Trades program conducts about 60 energy retrofits a year in social housing belonging to the Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation. This includes demolishing the existing drywall, mold remediation, improving insulation and rebuilding. Overall energy costs for the tenant decrease and the space becomes more useable as well.

“Back when I used to work in the basements as a support worker [a tenant] told me that her mom had hers done by us a year before I got hired and she was saving \$800 a year. She was an elderly lady with not much income and that \$800 went a long, long way. So now she got more food in the fridge and just a better sense of pride and love.”

—Corey Foley, Youth Supports Coordinator



Pictured above are former Train for Trades participants digging at a worksite.

"Back when I used to work in the basements as a support worker [a tenant] told me that her mom had hers done by us a year before I got hired and she was saving \$800 a year."

Understanding EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (EI)

Employment Insurance Overview

The Train for Trades program is tied in to eligibility for EI upon completion so a brief review is provided here.

Employment Insurance ‘regular benefits’ are intended to provide “temporary financial assistance to unemployed Canadians who have lost their job through no fault of their own, while they look for work or upgrade their skills” (Government of Canada, 2014a). Criteria for job losses can include “shortage of work, seasonal or mass lay-offs” (Government of Canada, 2014b).

CALCULATING EI

Calculating eligibility for EI is a fluid process because it is based on a number of variables including number of hours/weeks worked, pay rate, regional unemployment rate, EI history etc.

Service Canada says:

- » Benefits are calculated using your “best weeks” of gross earnings (see below) during the qualifying period.
- » The qualifying period can vary. The minimum is determined by regional unemployment and the maximum is the previous 52 weeks.
- » Once the best weeks divisor is determined your total earnings are divided to obtain an average.
- » Benefits are calculated at 55% of this amount up to a maximum amount of \$524/week.

VARIABLE BEST WEEKS

The process for calculating EI benefits went through a significant change in 2013 with the introduction of [variable best weeks](#). Designed to make EI “more fair, flexible and responsive to regional economic conditions” your EI benefits will be calculated using your best weeks of earnings over the qualifying period (generally 52 weeks) rather than the average earnings. The number of weeks used ranges from 14-22 depending upon the rate of unemployment in your community (EI Economic Region). The areas with the lowest rates of unemployment will use the best 22 weeks while areas with the highest rates of unemployment will use the best 14 weeks).

As of February 8th to March 14th 2015, the [regional unemployment rate table](#) stated that for the St. John's Newfoundland EI Economic Region:

- » the unemployment rate was 5.5%
- » 700 insured hours are required to qualify for Regular Benefits (this translates to 17.5 weeks of work at 40 hours/week or 20 weeks at 35 hours/week)
- » The minimum number of weeks payable is 14 while the maximum is 36.
- » The benefit rate will be developed based on the best 22 weeks.

EI Family Supplement

Additional funds may be available for low-income households with children (determined by receipt of Canada Child Tax Benefit). If the net family income is less than \$25,921/year, then the Family Supplement can increase the benefit rate up to 80% of average insurable earnings.



Colourful homes in St. John's, Newfoundland.

About

CHOICES FOR YOUTH

History

Choices for Youth is a housing support agency for youth 16-29 in the St. John's, NL metro area. It was founded in 1990 in response to "an identified need among youth, the community, and government to have an empowerment-based program available to youth for whom 'home' was not an option" (CHRN, 2013). The need for the program arose from the closure of the Mount Cashel² orphanage . While that site had to be closed, the needs of the community did not disappear.

For the first ten years of the program, Choices operated as in-care model/group home style. In 2000/2001, legislation changed in Newfoundland, which affected the agency significantly. "All of a sudden, young people had a right to choose other things, other than what we were offering them. So the organization was faced with, I guess in hindsight, a bit of a blessing, a critical moment of either folding up shop, that we've done our bit, that we're not relevant anymore or reinventing ourselves. We chose to do that by becoming an agency that works for more of an over-16 population, harm reduction, at-risk youth, homelessness. [It's] more of an outreach model supporting young people out in the community," Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth.

While the provision of supportive housing options remains a critical component of the work that Choices does, it also strives to give youth "access to a variety of services that promote healthy personal development, and a sense of belonging within an environment of respect, tolerance, peace, and equality" (Choices for Youth website).

2 The Mount Cashel orphanage, a boys' home run by the Christian Brothers of Ireland in Canada (a community of the Roman Catholic Church) was closed on June 1st 1990, following several complaints of physical and sexual abuse and numerous investigations. Following Confederation, the government placed Crown Wards (individuals in the case of the child welfare system) at Mount Cashel so not all residents were indeed orphans. The sexual abuse scandal – which affected more than 300 residents – is considered to be Canada's largest and one of the largest in the world. (http://www.heritage.nf.ca/law/wells_gov_mt_cashel_timeline.html; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Cashel_Orphanage)

Philosophy

[Choices for Youth's website](#) states: “Our organization is based on the philosophy that **everyone has a right to:**

- » Safe housing;
- » A standard of living that promotes physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and social development;
- » An environment of mutual accountability, responsibility, independence, equality, dignity, peace, and respect;
- » Protection from abuse;
- » Participation in any decision making that affects their lives.”

Core Values

The core values of Choices for Youth are:

- » Act with empathy and kindness.
- » Choose to see the potential.
- » Cultivate safe, inclusive spaces, and promote diversity.
- » Work hard, with boundless ambition and strategic excellence.
- » Inspire hope, and create opportunities that empower.

According to the [Choices for Youth website](#): “Choices for Youth strives to be a model of diversity and inclusion, and our Board Members, staff, volunteers, and program participants reflect the many faces, cultures, identities, abilities, and walks of life that make up our province. We are a learning-centered organization that values the perspectives and contributions of all people, and strive to incorporate the needs and values of diverse communities into the design and implementation of inclusive programs. We respect, value, celebrate, and welcome racialized people, all sexual orientations, women and trans* people, Aboriginal and First People, people with disabilities, with mental illness, and those from all social strata”.

Model

Choices for Youth began with a “simple, two-step process: help youth **find** housing, education, and employment, and then help them **maintain** it” (Choices for Youth website).

As they developed their knowledge and grew to understand more about the needs of youth, their outreach and harm reduction philosophy has led to a more complex programming model.

The Choices website states:

- » **Step 1:** Provide individuals with options to find housing, employment, training, and education.
- » **Step 2:** Provide intensive models of support on personal barriers to achieving the desired outcomes in Step 1.
- » **Step 3:** Increase youth engagement in individuals’ immediate and broader communities.
- » **Step 4:** Increase options and support for continued individual stability and independence.

Programs

Now in operation for 25 years, Choices for Youth offers a number of core programs to meet the diverse needs of the youth of St. John’s. Each program is designed to fit one or more core areas of focus: Crisis Response, Supportive Housing, Targeted Supports and/or Fostering Independence. Youth can be involved in multiple programs at the same time. Program participants may also receive individual services to meet their needs. There are approximately 80 staff in the organization and they serve the needs of about 1,000 youth per year.

The area(s) of focus for each program is listed below in the descriptions.

- » [Shelter for Young Men](#) – Crisis Response/Supportive Housing - This nine-bed facility is an emergency shelter for homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 29 who identify as male. Youth can stay for up to a month. In 2013-2014, the shelter had 229 admissions and 259 turn-aways with no availability and a 95.7% occupancy rate. The average length of stay is 21 days, 80% of users have mental health and addictions issues and there is a 69% repeat user rate.
- » [RallyHaven](#) – Crisis Response/Supportive Housing - This program provides 11 youth with long-term, supportive, communal living opportunities in four Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation houses in downtown St. John’s. Youth receive individualized and regular supports while in the program and there are follow-up activities after they exit. Since 2011, 41 youth have been supported. Of these, 14 (re) started an educational program, 16 found employment or began a pre-employment program and 15 maintained housing for a year+.

**"It's a really cool feeling,
that the guys from prior
or the person prior
built my living space."**

—Matthew, age 21, Tier 1 Participant, Train for Trades

- » [The Lilly](#) – Supportive Housing/Targeted Response - The first affordable housing facility for male and female youth experiencing homelessness in St. John's, The Lilly opened in 2010. It houses 14 youth, ages 16-24, in 1- and 2-bedroom units and is staffed 24/7. It is modeled after Eva's Phoenix in Toronto and the renovations were done by the youth in the Train for Trades program. Since 2010, 80 youth have resided at The Lilly, of which 80% availed of The Lilly as long-term housing and 95% were employed or enrolled in education/employment programs while living at The Lilly.



'The Lilly' is a transitional housing project built as the pilot initiative for Train for Trades.

“The Lilly is transitional housing. There are two floors, there’s a kitchen to each floor and a living area to each floor, but everybody gets their own room and room key to get in to the rooms...It’s a really cool feeling that the guys from prior or the person prior built my living space.”

—Matthew, age 21, Train for Trades Tier 1 participant and resident of The Lilly

- » [Outreach and Youth Engagement](#) – Crisis Response/Targeted Supports/Fostering Independence - This initiative serves as the gateway into Choices for Youth for most youth. It includes a drop-in at the Youth Services Centre, a meal program and the staff team provides programming to support the diverse needs of youth, including housing, employment, education, life skills, lifestyle choices and mental health and addictions supports. This acts as a central hub that enables Choices staff to connect youth to the programs that are right for them. In 2013-14, there were 20,948 requests for service, and they provided food or access to food over 8,000 times. There were 700 distinct individuals served and the forecast for 2014-2015 is 1,200.

There are three main programs within the Outreach and Youth Engagement program area:

- › [Jumpstart](#) – This 12-week pre-employment program operates three times per year and supports youth to learn basic employability skills, including property maintenance, home repairs, carpentry, gardening, cooking and food safety. Staff and two youth mentors, who are past participants of the program, support the youth. In 2013-14, 29 youth completed the program. 16 youth were connected to further education, 23 gained employment and 28 were assisted to find or maintain housing.
- › [Momma Moments](#) – This program supports young pregnant and parenting women to improve their healthy living skills and effectively care for their children. Groups run weekly in St. John's and Conception Bay South. In 2013-14 the program served 39 young mothers and 52 children. 100% reported healthier eating habits, 15% secured safe and affordable housing and 88% received access to public health and counselling services. Building from this program, Choices is developing a Young Parents Supportive Housing and Resource Centre. This project will combine support services and housing for young, single-parent families, and is designed to help single parents improve their parenting success and keep their children in their care.
- › [Youth in Transitions](#) – This provincial pilot program is offered through the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services and in the metro area in partnership with Choices for Youth. It's a life skills based program providing individualized support staff (from the Outreach and Youth Engagement Team) to help youth develop skills such as budgeting, meal planning, laundry and transportation. Since October 2013, 55 young people have taken part in the program. Of these, 27 have secured stable housing and 22 have completed and exited the program.
- » [Moving Forward](#) – Targeted Supports - This project provides intensive support for youth aged 16-24 who struggle with complex mental health issues. In partnership with Eastern Health and Stella's Circle, Moving Forward assists youth who exhibit high-risk behaviours through one-on-one and supportive groups. In 2013-14 there were 17 youth participants and 75% of participants found stable housing.
- » [Train for Trades](#) – Fostering Independence - This program forms the core of this toolkit and is discussed in more detail throughout. Essentially, the program provides employment and skills training in a supportive environment for at-risk youth while they learn construction skills and retrofit houses/facilities belonging to Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation, private citizens, or community partners. In 2013-14, the program enrolled 20 youth across three tiers. Eleven of the youth completed a GED and 70% of graduates are now employed or in post-secondary school.
- » [Youth Leadership Council \(YLC\)](#) – Fostering Independence – When youth homelessness is not a part of our everyday lives, the gap between perception and reality of the issue can be enormous. The YLC helps close this gap, and connects funders, the community and other support systems to real information and lived experience. It is an intentional process of involving youth in the decision-making process and program design. Youth also deliver workshops on self-injury and hope to expand to other topics. In 2013-14, the Council grew from 4-12 members and it held 14 self-injury workshops.

In the delivery of all these programs and across all four areas of focus (Crisis Responses, Supportive Housing, Targeted Supports, Fostering Independence), Choices for Youth strives to empower at-risk youth by helping them secure stable housing, employment and education. These are held as the three Key Life Factors at Choices for Youth and are fundamental to helping at-risk youth transition into healthy adults.

TRAIN FOR TRADES

Overview

“I call it the raw material of an opportunity, because our real objective is training and employing at-risk youth to have every opportunity to live sustainable futures.”
—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

Train for Trades (T4T) was created in 2008 to provide employment for at-risk and homeless youth. It uses the expression “Real Pay, Real Work” to emphasize that while this is a support program it is also employment.

The program has three main categories of focus:

- » **Training** – designed to meet the needs of youth and industry, where youth receive the necessary safety knowledge and general construction training combined with energy efficiency retrofit training to prepare them for a career in the trades.
- » **Employment** – industry driven and meaningful, where youth are given the opportunity to gain valuable construction/energy efficiency retrofit experience, build on acquired knowledge and learn how to manage a job.
- » **Support** – Intensive Support Model (ISM) implemented to help youth navigate a personal plan for success and to attain the stability necessary to move forward in their lives.

The program targets many of the hardest-to-serve youth, including those without a high school education (or literacy issues), individuals with a history of addiction or mental health issues and youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

"I call it the *raw material of an opportunity* because our real objective is training and employing at-risk youth to have every opportunity to live sustainable futures."

History

Based on Eva's Phoenix in Toronto, the program emerged during the renovation of the Lilly Building, a former warehouse space that was developed into a Transitional Housing program for youth. Participants in T4T were engaged in the process of renovating the building. The success of the pilot proved that the program model was successful and that training/employment could help at-risk youth achieve positive changes in their lives.

To help determine the next stage of the project, Choices for Youth (CFY) looked to Winnipeg's [BUILD](#) organization; specifically the Warm-Up Winnipeg program.

BUILD, an acronym for Building Urban Industries for Local Development, "is a social enterprise non-profit contractor and a training program for people who face barriers to employment. We retrofit homes with insulation and high-efficiency toilets as well as water-and-energy-saving devices (showerheads, CFLs etc.). Our work lowers utility bills, employs neighbourhood people, cuts crime, and decreases greenhouse gas emissions" (BUILD website).

BUILD's program is six months in length and includes an 8-10 week in-class component that looks at both vocational training and life skills training. This is followed by a four month practicum where participants can get work experience in one of BUILD's five social enterprise divisions: Insulation, Plumbing, Maintenance, Patch and Paint, Cabinet. What's especially unique about BUILD is that local jobs are

A shift was therefore made in the Train for Trades program to focus on green retrofitting – improving energy efficiency in low-income social housing. This allowed CFY to develop a program that was a crossover of three key social issues – youth homelessness, unemployment and energy conservation. It also allowed the organization to address the skilled trades labour force shortage by improving basic skill levels and readying young people for further training or employment.

As the program evolved, new stages were added (the Tier system) and new kinds of work emerged, including Modernization and Improvement through Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation and private contracting. The program continues to evolve – particularly as it moves to become a self-sustaining social enterprise – and these changes will be discussed further in the section '[Changes to T4T for 2015-2016](#)'.



APPLYING *for the Program*

Criteria

In order to qualify for the Train for Trades program youth must be between the ages of 18 and 25. They must not have received Employment Insurance (EI) in the past three years and must not currently be EI eligible.

Unlike many programs, T4T wants to ensure that it is giving opportunities to at-risk youth, including those with mental health and addictions issues, criminal records, no high school education etc. While these barriers are not a must, a youth who is functioning well with few barriers will probably not be admitted to the program.

“You can be overqualified, if you’re currently working, if you’ve got your high school. If things are going well for you there’s no need for you to be in this support program. Generally the people who join are people who don’t have their high school, who are looking to get their GED. There are people who have it and still join Train for Trades because it’s something they need in their life. A friend of mine actually, he tried to join and he had a child (which is why he wanted to join) but he had a full-time job already and he had his high school. I mean he had everything working out for him so he was overqualified.”
—Matthew, age 21, Tier 1 participant

The following provides a snapshot of the backgrounds of youth participants in Train for Trades.

FIG.3 BACKGROUNDS OF T4T YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

| | |
|------------|--|
| 67% | » Unstable housing in family origin |
| 66% | » reliving this unstable housing situation |
| 62% | » repeat shelter use |
| 66% | » dropped out of school |
| 72% | » unemployed |
| 75% | » criminal justice system involvement |
| 59% | » substance abuse issue |



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The chart demonstrates that the commitment Train for Trades has to working with at-risk youth is more than just on the surface. The youth that take part in the program bring significant challenges with them, which require ongoing support and intervention.

A program that is going to target and welcome youth from these backgrounds needs to ensure that it has the proper support in place in terms of staffing levels/skills, staff and youth training and safety. Programs also need to figure out what outcomes they want to achieve with youth from such diverse backgrounds and how they will go about achieving them.

Application/Screening Process

Youth serving agencies in St. John's and the surrounding area can refer youth to the program. In completing the referral form youth are asked to provide basic information and explain their personal/social barriers to employment. The referring agency is also able to explain why the individual would make a good candidate for Train for Trades.

The Program Coordinator and the Youth Supports Coordinator complete an in-depth intake assessment, which is 12 pages in length. In addition to making sure that the youth meet the specified criteria, they also want to ensure that the youth is ready to make a change. Areas on the intake and assessment form include:

- » reasons why the youth wants to apply for Train for Trades
- » history with employment and employment training programs
- » strengths and challenges in an employment setting
- » conflict resolution
- » educational history
- » family and friends/support systems
- » health overview (physical and mental health, dental and eye care)
- » drug and alcohol history
- » criminal justice history
- » housing situation
- » transportation access
- » financial and identification status



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The level of detail in the intake and assessment is critical to ensuring, not only that the youth is a good fit with the program, but also that the program can provide the necessary supports to the young person.

It is important that a full explanation is given as to the reasons these questions are being asked. Because T4T encourages and supports participation from youth with significant risk factors, youth need to be informed that their honesty is critical in answering these questions. Youth have probably previously needed to hide the extent of the challenges in their history and current situation. This is a rare opportunity for them to share the full range of issues in their lives with someone who is not going to judge them.

“Sometimes there’s some criminal activities and you know, the youth really respects that we don’t judge that part of them. That’s one thing I always hear: ‘you know what, the past was the past and now we’re gonna move forward’. So, for the most part they face a lot of issues but they’re resilient, they definitely fight through. There’s lots of empathy around what they went through.”
—Corey Foley, Youth Supports Coordinator, Train for Trades

Duration

The initial length of the Train for Trades program was 44 weeks. This was designed to ensure that youth had enough hours to qualify for Employment Insurance and for funding to return to school.

Now that the Tier system is implemented there is no time restriction to move through the program. Some youth have been supported to stay in the program while on the waiting list for school, which provides them with extra income and gives T4T a skilled youth to assist in mentoring the newer participants.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

As discussed in the EI section, eligibility varies across the country, so program planners should learn about EI eligibility in their own community if enabling youth to qualify for it is an objective.

In most cases, the length of time a youth can stay is going to be dependent on the financial resources of the organization. A balance will have to be struck between the ideal length of time needed to get a youth back on their feet with the help of supports and training and the need to have as many people participate in the program as possible.

"Sometimes there's some criminal activities and you know, the youth really respects that we don't judge that part of them. That's one thing I always hear: 'you know what, the past was the past and now we're gonna move forward.'"

—Corey Foley, Train for Trades

Completion

The goal of T4T is to prepare youth for future employment or to get them ready to enter a training program ([post-secondary](#), apprenticeship etc.). The typical Train for Trades experience is 44 weeks, established, as discussed in Duration, to give youth enough hours to qualify for Employment Insurance (EI) and funding for school.

“An awesome program. I’d describe it as giving you a second chance in making your life better. I had zero to none experience when I started, and before my time was up I had all the experience I would need to start off here and make it easier for me to really start college. They pretty much save you in the long run if you listen them, do as they want you to do to succeed. It’s a great life turner. It’s a life-changing opportunity.”

—Samantha, age 22, past participant Train for Trades and Carpentry student at Carpenters Millwrights College

In Newfoundland, some students are able to access funding for post-secondary school through EI or through the provincial [Department of Advanced Education & Skills](#) (AES).

AES offers [Skills Development Training](#) funds to individuals who qualify for [EI](#). This funding can cover some or all of the costs associated with school for a period of up to three years including:

- » Tuition
- » Books
- » Mandatory Fees
- » Living Expenses
- » Dependent Care Expenses
- » Disability Needs
- » Transportation
- » Accommodation

Dylan, a Tier 3 participant, is on the waiting list for a heavy equipment operator course. He estimates that the funding he will receive because of his participation in T4T will save him \$16,000 in course fees.

AES also offers [wage subsidies](#) to employers who hire skilled trades workers or apprentices. Additionally, AES can provide individuals receiving social assistance with income while they are registered in school.

A variety of federal income assistance programs are available for individuals interested in [returning to school](#). Additionally, Service Canada offers [Apprenticeship Grants](#) during and upon completion of an apprenticeship to qualified individuals. It is important to ensure that Employment Skills Development Canada staff (or their designate) give you permission to attend school while on EI or your eligibility may be cancelled.

**"An *awesome* program.
I'd describe it as giving
you *a second chance* in
making your *life better*."**

—Samantha, age 22, Past Participant of Train for Trades



Sheldon Pollett is the Executive Director of Choices for Youth.

“We are in the business of having our employees stolen. In fact, one of our young people recently took two weeks to tell us about an employment opportunity he had in the private sector, because he was so loyal and didn’t want to disappoint us. But once he finally broke the news and told us we were ecstatic for him. Why would we ever hold a young person back from the kind of opportunity that this is all designed around?”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The funding opportunities available in Newfoundland/Labrador are not necessarily the same in all other provinces/territories. There are limited resources available to support individuals to attend post-secondary school. What is available depends on the province/territory’s legislation and funding supports, the current economic climate, an individual’s status (i.e. special programs exist for women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal Peoples) and other factors.

Programs should not be designed with an expectation that all individuals will be able to attend post-secondary training, unless the funding options are continually and thoroughly investigated and regularly updated.

However, this is not to say that post-secondary education should not be a goal of such a program. Agencies may wish to pursue corporate sponsorship or other funding sources to be able to offer scholarships to individuals who wish to attend. Combined with EI (assuming the individual receives permission to attend school) and scholarships, there may be sufficient funding to support someone’s tuition and other costs.

About THE WORK

Hours

Youth work Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm. They have a 35-hour work week and one hour for lunch daily. Youth are required to show up on time and ready to work including having their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). They can be excused from work to attend specific appointments (as negotiated with staff) or to attend GED classes.

Tiers

Train for Trades uses a three-tier model. This is a recent innovation and is part of the focus on making the switch from an employment support program to a social enterprise activity.

While not all youth are given the opportunity to move through the tiers, not doing so is not considered a failure. In some ways, the tiers create a graduated system in that youth who move up usually do so one tier at a time and show that they have developed necessary skills and require reduced support. However, it is possible to have successful outcomes in the program without ever leaving Tier 1.

Since one of the goals for the program is enabling youth to accrue enough hours to qualify for Employment Insurance and support to access post-secondary school/training programs some youth will move on before advancing to Tier 2.

TIER 1

Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director at Choices for Youth describes Tier 1 as “really energy retrofit, it’s really good entry-level work, it’s skilled, there is a lot of training, but it’s very repetitive work. It gives us a chance to really work with young people so they really get the skills down pat.”

Tier 1 is the entry level into the program and generally lasts about 44 weeks, although youth can stay in the program longer. There are 10 youth in Tier 1.

Tier 1 youth are paid \$11/hour. Provincial minimum wage is \$10.25 as of October 1, 2014 and increases to \$10.50 on October 1, 2015. They are given a high level of support – usually one Youth Support Worker to a team of four to six youth, plus access to one of the Youth Supports Coordinators.

Tier 1 youth do basement green retrofitting for Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation. The overall goal is to make the basements warmer for the winter, thus saving the tenant money on their heating bill.

TIER 2

When a youth is interested in extending their stay with Train for Trades and they show a good grasp of construction fundamentals, they move into the Modernization & Improvement (M&I) program. This program is also an initiative of the Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation but involves a more detailed amount of work, including exterior and interior refurbishment of an entire house.

Tier 2 youth are paid \$13/hour. They receive a reduced level of support from staff, but staff remain present when working and provide support as needed. There are 5 youth in Tier 2.

TIER 3

Youth who progress to Tier 3 become full-time employees of Choices for Youth with all the rights and benefits of any other employee, including sick days, vacation days and family leave. Their salary increases to \$15/hr. There are 5 youth in Tier 3.

Tier 3 youth work independently with contracting supervision from the Site Manager. They function effectively as a construction company bidding on projects within community, government and private sectors.

“Tier 3, our objective there is that becomes the point at which young people really can work independently. They’ve got the skills, they’ve got the drive, the motivation. We can—just like any contractor would—set them up with a set of tasks and a job to do and they can just go do it with minimal support.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The Tier model is an excellent way for youth to develop their skills. It helps youth learn the basics before moving on to more challenging work.

It may be helpful to have clearly delineated expectations to define what needs to be attained in order to progress through the tiers (see [Steps to Progress](#) at Covenant House Vancouver in Transitional Housing toolkit for an example).

The Tier 1 salary is higher than the provincial minimum wage, which provides encouragement for youth to engage with the program. Given the \$2 increase with each tier there is significant incentive to move up in the Tiers.

The Work

“We’re given a lot of experience in a bunch of different fields, so when we go out in the work force, we’ve got a bunch of experience on our hands.”

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 participant, Train for Trades.

RETROFITS

Retrofits make up the core program and provide work for the majority of the youth in T4T. Train for Trades has a contract with Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) to complete 60 retrofits annually. This work involves stripping basement walls, removing the framework and on exterior walls, reframing, filling cracks, installing insulation, vapour barrier, dry wall etc. Overall energy costs for the tenants decrease and the space becomes more useable.

MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT (M&I)

A second, newer contract with NLHC is through its Modernization and Improvement (M&I) program, which works to upgrade the condition of social housing stock. This is full on restoration of the entire building envelope.

The M&I program includes replacing roofing, siding, doors and windows. The success of NLHC’s exterior renovation program has recently allowed them to move into interior renovations, including tearing out existing walls and reframing, insulating, installing and painting new walls. In addition, new flooring is put down in the units. T4T has been able to obtain contracts for both exterior and interior work.

T4T has an initial contract for 10 units of housing. To date, four have been completed and two are nearly completed.

SPECIAL CONTRACTS

This is a newer area of focus for T4T but is key to the sustainability of the program and, in many ways, takes it back to its roots when it renovated The Lilly building. Other projects have included building a garage and a barn, installing bathrooms for the St. John’s Native Friendship Centre etc.

“If we can build things for ourselves, for our own young people, we can also build things for pretty much anyone in the community.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

Choices for Youth is also a client of Train for Trades; in addition to The Lilly, T4T renovated the Duckworth site and has plans to build six units of affordable housing for the agency’s Rallyhaven support program shortly.

"We're given a lot of experience in a bunch of *different fields*, so when we go out in the work force, we've got *a bunch of experience on our hands*."

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 Participant, Train for Trades



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Part of the goal in creating a sustainable social enterprise is ensuring that the program receives funding from various sources so that it is not dependent on one source of income. While two of the projects that support Train for Trades work come from the same source (Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation) they are actually funded from two different budget lines, so even if one is cancelled it is quite possible that the other will continue. T4T is increasingly bidding on and obtaining unique contracts that will help expand the scope of its work.



The central hub of Choices for Youth is the Outreach and Youth Engagement Centre.

Standards

In the construction industry there are many standards that need to be met. Train for Trades works hard to ensure that the work that is done by the youth is of high quality so that it can pass all of the city inspections. Just because the work is being carried out by youth does not mean that there is any leniency given when it comes to codes and inspections. The work must be the same quality as any mainstream construction company.

Train for Trades also wants repeat business, thus it must deliver a quality product for the various employers it works with. Construction companies thrive on repeat business and word of mouth referrals. Despite being a social enterprise, T4T wants to do quality work to meet the expectations of the people and organizations that contract it.

T4T also continually meets the requirements for the Certificate of Recognition™, which is a provincial safety standard that allows it to bid on government contracts. This will be discussed in more detail in the safety section.

“Like any business, if we don’t do good quality work and we don’t do it on time, don’t do it on budget, don’t do it on code...Every single unit of energy retrofit that we do, there’s 60 of them annually - that’s sixty inspections and somewhere around maybe three or four inspections per retrofit. That’s a lot of inspections. [We] don’t get any special leniency from [the city inspectors] around the work because we’re a social enterprise, non-profit, working with at-risk young people. We have to meet every code that the city has around our work. That’s been the deliverable for us - doing good-quality work so that we actually are seen as, ‘Wow, these are people we want to hire because they do good work, and you know what, I can also feel good about it because they’re also training and employing young people.’”
—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Organizations need to ensure they are aware of all health and safety standards related to the appropriate industries and that they do quality work that meets or exceeds these standards. While with Train for Trades this involves construction standards, a cooking program might need to meet food handling requirements. Meeting Human Resource requirements, proper financial management and general employer-employee obligations are also important.

Standards can also be understood more broadly to refer to the need to meet consumer expectations. A social enterprise will not succeed if it creates a bad product or has lousy customer service. It must meet deadlines in order to please its customer base. While consumers might go to a social enterprise once just on the merits of being a social enterprise, they will not return if they are not getting value for their money.

SUPPORTS *to* SUCCESS

While the very design of the program model itself is designed to meet the needs of youth, there are also three components of additional support that help make the program successful.

Intensive Support Model (ISM)

Train for Trades uses an Intensive Support Model (ISM) to provide 24/7 support to existing (and past) participants. During the day, support is provided by the Youth Support Worker on the job site and by the Youth Supports Coordinator as needed for non-job related issues (access to appointments, advocacy, support with criminal justice system/health/child welfare etc.)

“If you had a medical appointment, if you had court for some reason, or family court, dentist, doctor, food bank, any of those things. If you were [working] somewhere else you would probably have to do that before work or after work or you would probably lose your job over it. If you got three court appointments in a month, your employer is probably going to say ‘I don’t need you cause you’re losing too much time’. For our support program if you have...something that you need to deal with, we’re gonna support you here, and we’re gonna provide a ride to the doctor, pick up from the doctor.”
—Joni King, Youth Support Worker, Train for Trades

Support, beyond addressing personal issues, also includes help applying for funding for school or for school itself (including conducting market research to determine the best program/school). T4T staff also support the youth after they are laid off from the program to apply for Employment Insurance.

In addition, staff are provided with work phones so that youth have a way of contacting them directly after hours. The support ranges from something that can be addressed in a text message or phone call to a serious issue that requires in-person staff support. A 6-week review conducted in the fall of 2013, found that there was an average of 5 or 6 calls/texts per staff each week. Staff are not paid for time spent dealing with these issues unless a significant amount of time is required, in which case they can arrange time off in lieu with approval from the Coordinator.

"The *huge support*, the support here alone is *wicked*. If you have any kind of problem, anything, *they'll help you* here and do whatever they're capable of doing for you."

“If you’re looking to get on the right path, if you took a wrong turn somewhere down the road and you want to get back on the right path and be successful, it’s definitely the place to go. The huge support, the support here alone is wicked. If you have any kind of problem, anything, they’ll help you here and do whatever they’re capable of doing for you. The construction part of it, the working part of it yes, but the support here alone is wicked. It really helps you a lot.”

—Dylan, age 22, Tier 3 participant, Train for Trades

Youth meet with the Youth Supports Coordinator every two weeks to check-in and follow-up on any outstanding support issues. As part of the Intensive Support Model they provide support individually on an “as-needed” basis.

If there is a need for counselling services or other support, youth can be referred internally within Choices for Youth, or externally to another youth service agency. Two youth are currently receiving in-house counselling through Choices for Youth.

CASE MANAGEMENT AS PART OF ISM

Train for Trades does not use a formal case management system. Following the very detailed initial intake and assessment, they document youth’s progress and supports in individual case files using Word.

When youth are involved with other service agencies, joint agency meetings are held to ensure the provision of wraparound services. These other agencies may maintain files using other systems and hold ongoing assessments.

A requirement of funding is the use of ARMS (Accountability Resource Management System), however this tool only flags employment & training.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The support available to youth throughout the program is exceptional yet also necessitates a low staff to client ratio (Train for Trades has a ratio of about 1 staff to 1.5-2 youth). Agencies need to consider the level of staffing they can afford to maintain and allow that to determine the level of support they can provide to youth. It will not be possible for all agencies to provide such an intensive support level for youth. The use of referrals to other agencies is important to help provide sufficient support when working with high-risk youth. Case conferences are key to ensure wraparound supports for the youth.

The after-hours support available at T4T is admirable and yet can clearly present challenges for staff. A shared roster of on-call duties may create the most flexibility for programs that wish to implement this level of support. That would give staff a bit more freedom and time off while also ensuring that youth always have access to staff support.

We do recommend the use of a case management program to ensure the smooth collection of data and reporting to funders, as well as to easily identify trends. We also recommend ongoing assessments to track client progress.

In the Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit, we discuss Efforts to Outcomes, which is one example of a good case management program; there are many others. In that toolkit we also highlight case plans, which further enables accurate data collection and consistency in reporting. If you are thinking of implementing a case management program, we encourage you to look at these resources.

There are also two case management tools – Youth Engagement Scale (YES) and Outcomes Star – that are tied to case planning and embedded within the case management software. There are multiple tools available and agencies may choose to create their own; the key is having tools at hand and training staff in their use.

GED

Choices for Youth recognizes that education is a key component of reducing youth homelessness. According to Corey Foley, Youth Supports Coordinator, the average youth interviewed for an assessment has a Grade 6 education. Beginning in the second year of operation, Train for Trades began providing access to a GED instructor. This allows the majority of youth to obtain their high school equivalency while in the T4T program.

“82% of the 700 young people who walked through our doors (Choices as a whole) last year don’t have high school completion and are not in school. That’s a massive number and a massive barrier for our young people. That doesn’t get into the number of people who have literacy issues and all that stuff, that’s purely based on not in school, didn’t finish high school. So we realized somewhere along the way while we were offering this incredible training opportunity and employment experience and support, but ‘Hold on now, but if they come out of this without a high school at least an equivalency, if not higher, their options are still incredibly limited.’ Because now not only do they have all this training and employment and skills, they have at minimum a high school equivalency. They can use it to get into post-secondary. They can use it to get a job because most jobs come with minimum high school completion. It was a real quick learn for us in terms of, ‘Hmm, all this is going to be for naught if they can’t do anything with it, because of an educational barrier.’ That’s a critical component. And offer it right on site, take off the tool-belt, go learn for a couple hours, put the tool-belt back on, go back to work. It’s huge.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

As Sheldon mentions, access is embedded into the program in a way that helps improve opportunities for success:

- » The GED training is part of the core program and youth are mandated to take part in the classes.
- » Train for Trades hires a part-time instructor (a retired teacher) who understands the unique and diverse needs the youth bring to the GED training.
- » The instructor comes to the job site twice a week during work hours. Youth do not have to go elsewhere after hours to complete the classes.
- » Youth do not lose income because they are taking part in the course and they do not have to pay for the training themselves.

Other GED programs are often full-time for a set period of time, which makes it challenging for youth to maintain employment while studying. Dylan, a Tier 3 participant, emphasizes this point: “I wanted to go apply to go back to school but I couldn't do it because I couldn't afford to go to school five days a week and not work when I have a small child. I come here I was able to go to work, get my high school and get ready for college all in one. So it was perfect.”

Thirty-four youth attempted the GED through Train for Trades and 33 (97%) were successful. Three youth obtained [Adult Basic Education \(ABE\)](#), which is similar to the GED but prepares the recipient for future academic training.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

As discussed in the Youth Employment Overview, there is a strong link between educational attainment and employment status. The way in which Train for Trades supports youth to obtain their GED is commendable because the educational component is embedded as a critical part of the overall employment program. Since a number of youth want to move on to post-secondary education, obtaining their GED is critical.

This is a critical support component of the T4T program. Because one of the goals of the program is to enable youth to access post-secondary education having the embedded GED program really helps make that a realistic possibility. We encourage other youth employment programs to embed education as a key aspect of their programming and to ensure that youth have easy access to the necessary supports.

Housing Supports

While Train for Trades does not have a formal housing component included in the program, Choices for Youth offers various forms of housing support including a shelter for young men and various transitional housing programs. If a youth identifies that housing is an issue then the Youth Supports Coordinator will work with the youth to help them obtain housing through CFY or independently in the community.



Train for Trades youth built 'The Lilly' a transitional housing program for youth.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

A lack of housing is an obvious barrier to successful participation in an employment program. An agency does not have to be a housing provider, but it should develop partnerships with landlords or housing providers in order to assist youth who run into problems. Additionally, programs should prepare to adjust their rules to help youth access long-term housing. If a youth needs to meet curfew or attend meetings at a shelter, the program should adjust the youth's hours. Programs may also need to assist youth with a housing search, including computer or telephone access, time off to view an apartment etc.

Theoretical APPROACHES

Harm Reduction Approach

Harm reduction is an approach that works to “meet people where they are at” when providing services. It usually refers to strategies aimed at reducing the risks and harmful effects associated with substance use and addictive behaviours. Harm reduction is often viewed negatively because of its link to substance use, but harm reduction approaches are used on a daily basis by the general population: hand washing, seat belts in cars, crosswalks and bike helmets.

In social services work, harm reduction approaches work to reduce harm, while complete abstinence may or may not be the goal. When there is a lack of desire or ability to stop using substances the main focus becomes reducing harm. For example, a needle exchange project helps eliminate the need for injection drug users to share needles.

The Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse has created five key principles for harm reduction. These are:

- » Pragmatism
- » Humane Values
- » Focus on Harms
- » Balancing Costs and Benefits
- » Priority of Immediate Goals

(Beirness et al., 2008)

Train for Trades works with extremely high-risk youth who may have histories in one or more of the following areas: homelessness, poverty, non-completion of high school, unemployment, substance use and criminal justice system involvement. By meeting youth where they are at and working with them through the provision of supports helps them succeed. While safety provisions mean a youth cannot work while under the influence, they will not be fired immediately. They will be sent home without pay and the Youth Supports Coordinator will discuss the situation with the individual. If a youth needs to attend substance abuse counselling they will be supported to do so. In some cases, a youth may be able to exit the program to attend a rehab facility and then return.

Similarly, youth who have histories with the criminal justice system are supported to work through their legal challenges. This could include time off for court appointments. Staff may advocate for youth or attend court with them to provide support.

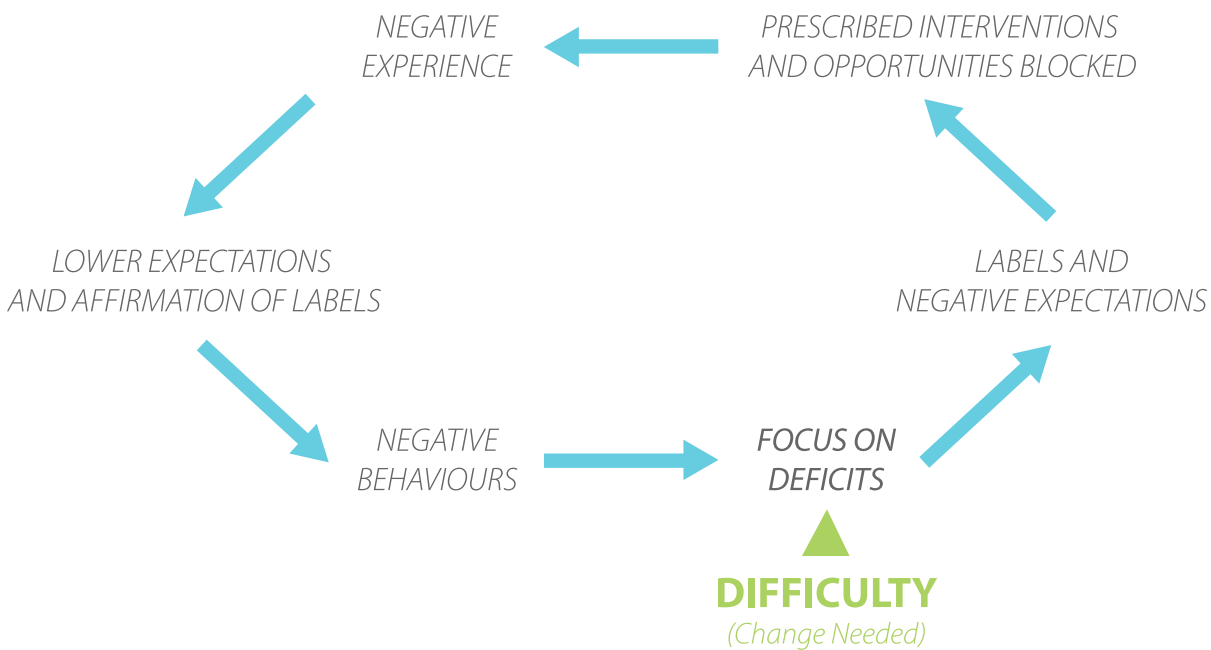
In many youth programs, and certainly in many jobs, youth needing time off for appointments such as these would not only not be supported to attend, but may be fired for missing work. The harm reduction approach that T4T utilizes therefore helps keep youth employed while also allowing them to deal with their issues.

Strength-Based Approach

Youth-serving social agencies, and indeed, many social service organizations often look at clients as “people with problems”. Staff ask “what’s wrong with this person?” or “How can I fix this person?” The point of origin in service-delivery is therefore based in weakness and creates an imbalance of power between the service provider and the client. Expectations for success are lowered and the client is disempowered.

Hammond and Zimmerman (2012) say that “McCasky (2008) outlines a deficit cycle (Figure 4) to explain the perspective that if we understand a problem, all we need to do is find an expert to analyze it then find a prescription that will fix it. This focus starts with a ‘needs assessment’ as it is believed that if it can be determined as to what is wrong and work out what the needs are we will know what needs to be done. However, this often leads to simplistic and narrow solutions that rarely address the real issues in the long term” (p.3).

FIG.4 THE DEFICIT CYCLE

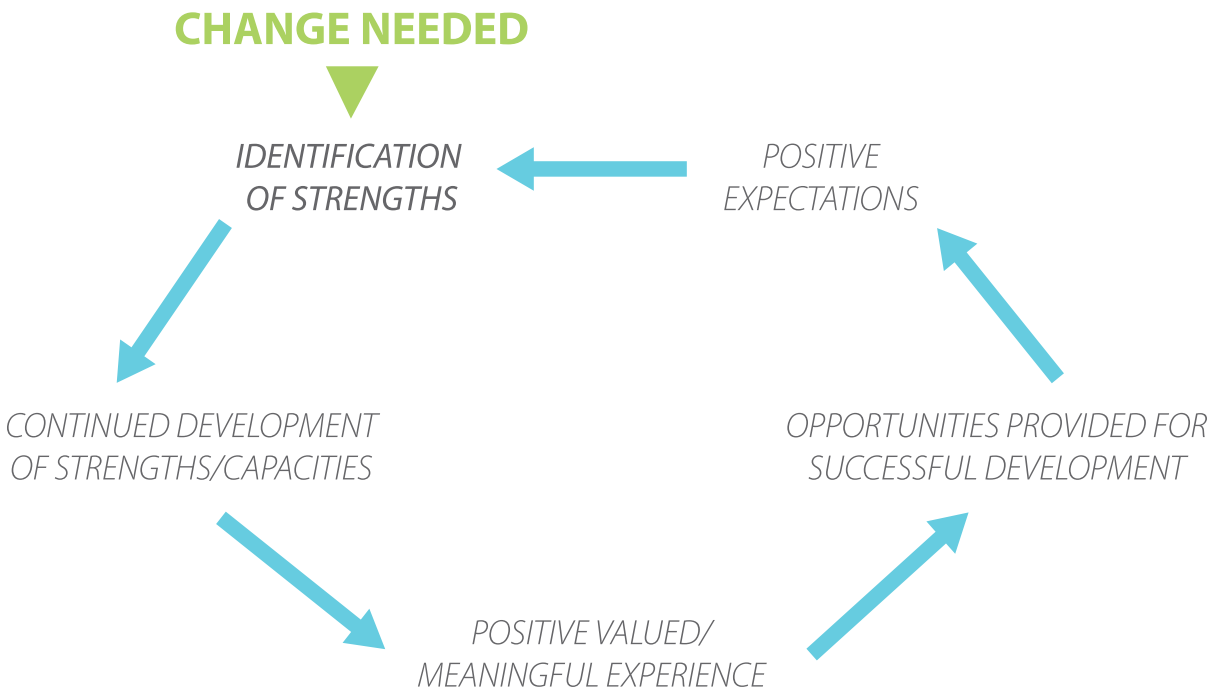


(from Hammond and Zimmerman, 2012, p.3)

A strength-based approach on the other hand, says “What’s right with this person?” It looks at each individual as someone with power and the ability to change their own circumstances. It recognizes that every person has strengths and abilities and looks to see how those skills can be enhanced.

Strength-based approaches emphasize the saying “the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem” (Hammond and Zimmerman, 2012, p. 3).

FIG.5 THE STRENGTHS-BASED CYCLE



(from Hammond and Zimmerman, 2012, p.3)

“The strengths-based cycle (Figure 5) begins with a more holistic focus that includes an emphasis on a person’s strengths and resources (internal and external) in the process of change. When challenges are experienced, problems and issues are acknowledged and validated, and strengths are identified and highlighted. This strengths exploration changes the story of the problem as it creates positive expectations that things can be different and opens the way for the development of competencies” (McCaskey, 2008 cited in Hammond and Zimmerman, 2012, p. 4).

The principles of strength-based practice are:

1. “An absolute belief that every person has potential and it is their unique strengths and capabilities that will determine their evolving story as a well as define who they are – not their limitations (not, I will believe when I see – rather, I believe and I will see).
2. What we focus on becomes one’s reality – focus on strength, not labels – seeing challenges as capacity fostering (not something to avoid) creates hope and optimism.
3. The language we use creates our reality – both for the care providers and the children, youth and their families.

4. Belief that change is inevitable – all individuals have the urge to succeed, to explore the world around them and to make themselves useful to others and their communities.
5. Positive change occurs in the context of authentic relationships – people need to know someone cares and will be there unconditionally for them. It is a transactional and facilitating process of supporting change and capacity building – not fixing.
6. Person’s perspective of reality is primary (their story) – therefore, need to value and start the change process with what is important to the person – not the expert.
7. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they are invited to start with what they already know.
8. Capacity building is a process and a goal – a life long journey that is dynamic as opposed to static.
9. It is important to value differences and the essential need to collaborate – effective change is a collaborative, inclusive and participatory process – ‘it takes a village to raise a child’” (Hammond, 2010, p. 5).

Train for Trades staff recognize the unique capacity of each youth and focus on their strengths rather than weaknesses. While they support youth through challenges, they also show youth what they are capable of. Many of the youth and staff talked about how great it felt to be giving back to the community and to help tenants reduce energy costs.

*“Spend a day in a basement and see how well people picked off the street basically –people who weren’t prior really going anywhere—how well they do what they do in those basements. I came in, I had no training, no experience doing what I’m doing. **And within days I was getting things done like a professional!**”
—Matthew, age 21, Tier 1 participant, Train for Trades*

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Some youth-service agencies choose to base their work in a number of theoretical underpinnings or to use specific theoretical approaches in dealing with youth support. Train for Trades does this to a certain extent with their focus on strength-based and harm reduction approaches, although these are less “theory” and more “ways of doing the work”. That said, it is likely that the Youth Support Workers and the Youth Supports Coordinators utilize a number of theories in their day-to-day work unknowingly. Often, academics develop theories that those involved in the trenches just consider to be part of everyday work.

The harm reduction and strength-based approaches are very integral to the work that Train for Trades does. They are a very pragmatic and youth-based way of doing the work and this is likely an important part of T4T’s success.

For a more extensive look at how theory can be embedded in the work, approaches to youth, case management and evaluation look at the Theories to Support the Work section of the Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit. Covenant House Vancouver and Toronto use a number of theories in their interactions with youth in their programs.

"I came in, I had no training, no experience doing what I'm doing.

And within days I was getting things done like a professional!"

—Matthew, age 21, Tier 1 Participant, Train for Trades

SAFETY

Safety is goal number 1 for Train for Trades. Every participant interviewed for this toolkit, including staff and youth, discussed the issue of safety in some capacity. Safety precautions are extensive and include youth not being allowed in a unit by themselves or to deal with tenants directly to the policy and procedures connected to safety.

Safety is addressed in a few key ways:

Training

Choices For Youth/Train for Trades contracts with the Carpenters Millwrights College to provide basic safety training for the youth in a number of key areas including: Fall Protection, Standard First Aid, WHMIS, Powerline Hazards, Fire Extinguisher and Ramset gun training. This is about \$2,000/youth in certificates, which is also beneficial for youth who go on to pursue future training or careers in similar skilled trades industries.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

The provincial government's [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) dictates what employers must do to help keep their employees safe and to prevent illnesses and accidents on the job. This includes emergency signage, development of evacuation procedures, eye wash stations, fall protection, risk awareness and the development of other relevant occupational health and safety guidelines. Several staff and youth form the Occupational Health and Safety committee and receive additional training to support their participation.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

All youth are trained in PPE standards. They must show up each and every day fully equipped (i.e. appropriate clothing, safety glasses, CSA approved work boots, hard hat). Failure to do so means that the youth is sent home and not paid for the day. Youth are supported to purchase their PPE upon entry into the program, which is helpful as they make the transition from unemployment or part-time (and often unrelated) work to full-time construction work. While PPE is a proper safety standard, youth and staff explained how safety requirements are much higher at Train for Trades than at other places they have worked.

“One [rule] is big...safety, we’re all about safety. That’s our main thing, we’re all about safety, safety, safety. You can’t go working without your protective equipment or anything like that; that just never happens, there is no go. There’s other companies out there I’ve been working for for years, they don’t even ask you to wear so much as a pair of safety glasses. Here, it’s mandatory which is wicked because it’s so dangerous. Even something as simple as having to wear steel-toe boots all the time. There’s companies out there you can just wear sneakers if you wanted to and you could break your feet, you could get something in your eye. Just a hard hat, just a simple thing like that.”

—Dylan, age 22, Tier 3 participant, Train for Trades



Dylan, a Tier 3, Train for Trades participant talks about Personal Protective Equipment.



Eddie St.Coeur from Choices for Youth, pictured with Tanya Gulliver and Steph Vasko of the Homeless Hub.

Certificate of Recognition™ (COR™) Certification

Train for Trades has had its Certificate of Recognition™ (COR™) accreditation from the Newfoundland and Labrador Construction Safety Association (NLCSA) since 2010. Designed for the construction industry, COR™ is a health and safety certification. “The program is designed to assist companies in the development and maintenance of a company-wide health and safety management program. Firms receive accreditation upon completion of COR™ training, development and implementation of a company-wide safety program, a comprehensive hazard assessment, and internal and external safety reviews. Specifically, the COR™ Program helps construction companies understand OH&S legislation, and employer and worker rights and responsibilities. Understanding these rights and obligations can also help firms avoid liability and ensure due diligence” ([NLCSA COR™ website](#)).

COR™ status is required to bid on any provincial government contract and many other organizations (public and private sector) also require it, including the City of St. John’s, Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation, Memorial University, Eastern Health, Nalcor Energy and Newfoundland Power.

COR™ AND PRIME

The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission of Newfoundland Labrador has an employer incentive program called PRIME. The practice incentive component of this provides a 5% refund to recognize employers who have good OH&S practices. Completion of COR™ can help a construction industry employer meet their PRIME requirements

“Well safety is our big thing. We are all about safety. We want everyone to go home with what they came in with...fingers, toes. That's why I emphasize there's nothing about speed with us. When I built houses it was all about the faster you can get it done the more money that can be made. We don't emphasize that here. We want these young people to learn. We want to take the time to learn. There's nothing that comes first rather than safety. Safety is the main thing. It's what we do for sure. Learning comes after the safety piece too, and learning about safety obviously, and the way to do it properly. When I was in this industry no one was looking out for you. It wasn't a big emphasis on things you know. And these days I want young people to go out into this industry and know the proper ways to be safe so they can get through their work days in a safe matter.”

—Ronnie O'Neill, Site Manager, Train for Trades

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Obviously, safety needs to be a critical component of any project working with vulnerable youth and particularly for a construction program. The focus that Choices for Youth puts on safety in its Train for Trades program, however, is exceptional.

Having COR™ status is useful in a couple of ways. From an organizational viewpoint it makes Train for Trades more viable as a company because it allows them to bid for a greater number of projects. They would not have their contract with Newfoundland Labrador Housing if it was not for their COR™ accreditation. It also proves to the youth the seriousness with which Train for Trades takes safety.

COR™ also makes up the bulk of Train for Trades' policies. Rather than having separate safety policies, youth at T4T are required to meet the mandates established by COR™. This means that they operate in a professional-level environment, which will help them transition to mainstream employment. For the youth, their knowledge of and experience with COR™ is something they can put on their resume to make them more marketable to future employers.

PARTNERSHIPS

There are three key (non-funding) partners that enabled the program to succeed:

- » Carpenters Millwrights College
- » Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation
- » CUPE Local 1860

Carpenters Millwrights College (CMC)

[Carpenters Millwrights College \(CMC\)](#) is a private training college established in 1996 and owned by the Carpenters Union, Local 579 and the Millwright Union, Local 1009. Choices For Youth/Train for Trades contracts with CMC to provide basic safety training for the youth in a number of key areas including: Fall Protection, Standard First Aid, WHMIS, Powerline Hazards, Fire Extinguisher and Ramset gun training.

Originally this training was done in a single block of a couple weeks, but is now spread out to accommodate the revolving entry dates of the program.

“It is very important for them to come and have some sort of formal training before going to a construction site. Construction sites are very dangerous. They need to be cognizant of how they can get hurt, so we focus a lot of the training on safety...by not doing an introductory level training, you’re putting youth at risk by having their first introduction to a jobsite being on the jobsite. They really need to prepare for what they’re getting into so they’re safe.”

—Kelly Power, Director of Carpenters Millwrights College



"It is very important for them to come and have some sort of formal training before going to a construction site. Construction sites are very dangerous. They need to be cognizant of how they can get hurt, so we focus a lot of the training on safety..."

— Kelly Power, Carpenters Millwrights College

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC)

The housing arm of the provincial government [Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation](#) was established in 1967 and reports to the Minister Responsible for Housing. Its mandate is “to develop and administer housing assistance policy and programs for the benefit of low to moderate income households throughout the province.” In 2013-2014, 15,046 households received direct assistance through the various social housing programs, including public affordable rental housing, rent supplements, subsidized mortgages, residential energy efficiency program etc. NLHC directly owns and operates 5,588 residential rental properties throughout the province. It is in these units that the Train for Trades program primarily operates. ([NLHC 2013-2014 Annual Report](#)).

NLHC has two programs that Train for Trades works under. One is the Modernization and Improvement (M&I) program, which works to upgrade the condition of social housing stock. The second program involves basement retrofits, which are part of the Heat Subsidy Program (discussed in the [section on Energy Poverty](#)).

“It’s the right thing to do. You’re helping your tenants, you’re helping your organization in the long run because you may be reducing your renovations and repairs. And preventing mould and these sorts of things. You’re also helping the kids that are most vulnerable and at risk. If we can get them on the right path, then it’s all worth it in the end. It’s the right thing to do for any community in my mind.”
—Dennis Kendell – Regional Operations Executive Director, Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation





CUPE

Newfoundland Labrador Division



CUPE Local 1860

[CUPE Newfoundland Labrador](#) has 60 different employer groups representing over 6,000 workers. Local 1860 represents the workers at NLHC. The union has played a positive partnership role by supporting the development of the Train for Trades program. Approximately 60% of work at NLHC is contracted out, and as a result the union does not oppose the work that the youth are doing for NLHC. The basement retrofits specifically were continually put off by NLHC due to more emergent issues.

While in some ways this sounds like a minor role, it is a very key and important one. The union could have blocked the project from getting off the ground if they had been at risk of losing work themselves. Choice for Youth met with union staff and members several times to educate them about the project and developed a cooperative partnership that allows the work to go forward at no risk to the union.

The union represents “the working unions that youth who complete the Train for Trades program will be looking to join. CUPE’s support of the program, assistance during the training stages, and placement of youth following the program, have been vital to participant success and will continue to factor heavily in the long-term feasibility of Train for Trades” (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013).

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Developing solid partnerships are key to success. Train for Trades built their partnerships by providing upfront information and education about the types of youth they serve, the goals of the program and what the partnership would look like.

Partnerships add to the credibility and future sustainability of programs; this is particularly true for a new program. The visible show of support from others is often key to obtaining government grants.

CFY/T4T evolved their partnerships over the years as the program stabilized. For example, in the beginning NLHC provided all sub-contractors and supplies; T4T does this on their own now. But they do still provide support beyond what they would provide to a mainstream construction company. For example, during each neighbourhood project NLHC leaves one unit empty for T4T to use as their headquarters.

They have signed Memorandums of Understanding that outline the roles for each partner. This is very helpful in reducing confusion and conflict.

Policies & PROCEDURES

As with any organization there are a great many policies and procedures that support the functions of the organization. Given that the transitional housing program forms part of a larger organization, some of the policies apply to the organization as a whole and are not specific to the youth employment program.

In many agencies, the policies are decided upon by the board (in consultation with senior management), while the procedures are developed by the staff. In others, policies –especially operational policies—are developed by the staff. Policies are goal-oriented and provide overarching principles, guidelines or frameworks for conducting the business of an organization. Procedures are more specific and provided detailed directions and instructions, including who does what, how and when.

Policies tell people what to do. Procedures tell them how to do it.

In developing your policies it is good to ask the follow questions:

- » What is the issue, problem or opportunity for which we need a policy? Can we define it?
- » Do we have a policy that does/should address this issue, problem or opportunity?
- » Do we need an effective guide for our actions and decisions in this area?
- » What do we intend this policy to do?
- » What outcomes do we expect to see?
- » What is the purpose of this policy?
- » Why do we need this policy?

As you develop your policies, consider what areas you need to develop policies in. For most agencies these include: financial, administrative, space management, human resources, safety/security and operations.

The policies used by Train for Trades are those of Choices for Youth, the majority of which are standard non-profit policies. The Personnel Policy section of the CFY manual can be found in the resources. It includes such topics as: social media, holidays, bereavement leave, travelling with youth etc.

The Train for Trades program works every year to meet the requirements related to the Certificate of Recognition™ program. While we have provided a brief outline of this program there are no policies that can be publicly shared. If you are intending to develop a construction-related employment program we encourage you to contact the [provincial/territorial safety association](#) in your jurisdiction for more information about certification.

STAFFING

Choices for Youth has a unique perspective on its staff and their roles. They operate a variety of programs to support youth in different ways including education, housing and employment. While each staff member has unique skills in a specific area, the skill set they have in common is the ability to deal with addictions, mental health, childhood trauma etc. Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director of Choices for Youth says, “So what we say to our staff is, ‘You guys are all completely interchangeable,’ tomorrow Sally can work in Train for Trades and Shelly from Train for Trades can work in Rallyhaven, you know Cindy from Rallyhaven can work at the Lilly, plus or minus a few skills. Because the main issue is around those true barriers for young people..”

Staff Training

Train for Trades staff complete several training courses that are required for their COR™ certification. These include Standard First Aid, Fall Protection, WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System), Power-line Hazard, Ramset, Asbestos Abatement and Fire Extinguisher training. These courses are taught at the Carpenters Millwrights College and are the same courses the youth take when beginning work.

T4T staff also complete training required by Choices for Youth including: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), which is taught by staff at C4Y and Non-Violent Crisis Intervention and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community (LGBTQ) training, which are taught by community members. Other training is completed based on the interests of the staff.



Samantha, a past participant of T4T, doing some carpentry work in the workshop.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

While most staff employed at Train for Trades and other youth-serving agencies are usually graduates of a college or university program for Child and Youth Workers (or a similar field of study) it is important that certain training is provided centrally for all staff. This helps create a unified perspective and can explain how a specific issue or area is dealt with by the agency. While colleges and universities cover the topics generally, the agency can drill down on a specific topic and explain its relevance to staff.

We recommend that agencies working with homeless or at-risk youth offer training on as many of the following topics as possible with a specific focus on youth:

- » Homelessness 101 (with a specific focus on homeless youth)
- » Standard First Aid and CPR
- » Harm Reduction
- » Working with People with Mental Health Issues/Addictions/Concurrent Disorders
- » Motivational Interviewing
- » Trauma Informed Care/Service Provision
- » Working with Victims of Violence
- » Self-Care for People in Helping Professions/Stress Management
- » Case Management (and specific training on any case management software or tools)
- » Training on any theories or approaches used by the agency
- » Communication and Active Listening
- » Conflict Resolution
- » LGBTQ and Gender Non-Conformity
- » Crisis Response and Management
- » Non-Violent Crisis Intervention
- » Understanding and Managing Aggressive Behaviour
- » Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression
- » Suicide Risk Assessment/Intervention or ASIST
- » Foundations to Criminal Justice
- » Measuring Success/Evaluation Strategies
- » Sex Workers and Victims of Human Trafficking

Job-specific training (such as the safety training T4T has their staff complete) is also important. Other trainings may be relevant as well depending on an individual's role within the staff team (i.e. leadership, supervision, team-building). The Toronto Hostels Training Centre provides a very [in-depth list of courses available](#).

Staff Roles

The intermeshing of Train for Trades as a program within the larger Choices for Youth agency means that some staff serve multiple functions or programs in addition to Train for Trades, while others work only for T4T. At the same time, some positions that are CFY staff, support the work of T4T, such as communications, development, and financial administration.

It is also important to remember that all youth are paid and in Tier 3 are actual employees of CFY.

In the Train for Trades program there are 8 positions that work directly with youth on a day-to-day basis – the Program Coordinator, the two Youth Supports Coordinators, the four Youth Support Workers and the Site Manager. This is a ratio of 2.5 youth per staff member.

Train for Trades Staff Job Descriptions

The **Program Coordinator** is responsible for the overall administration and delivery of the Train for Trades Program to ensure that the philosophy, goals and objectives are met. This individual works closely with all partners and funders and is responsible for developing and writing budgets and reports to provide program accountability. They have responsibility for staff support and coordination, including recruitment, hiring, orientation, supervision and evaluation. They manage the Human Resource requirements for youth participants, including recruitment, screening, training, evaluation, retention and termination.

The **Administration Support Worker** provides support to the Program Coordinator. This person is responsible for the procedural administration of the program, including maintaining documentation for Certificate of Recognition™ and Occupational Health and Safety regulations, scheduling meetings, maintaining a filing system, inventory control, petty cash and expense claims, database maintenance and maintaining youth support documentation.

There are two **Youth Supports Coordinators**, one who works with Tier 1 youth and one who works with Tier 2 and 3 youth. This reflects the decreased need for support as the youth move through the Tier process. The Youth Supports Coordinators work in conjunction with the Youth Support Workers to determine if youth have additional program or service needs. While they have some administrative and program responsibilities that overlap with the Program Coordinator and Administration Support Worker, their roles differ in terms of the level of support that they provide to the youth themselves. They serve as the primary youth advocate and youth representative for mandatory services. They develop letters for youth (income support, justice system) as needed and assist youth with medical appointments, EI claims, post-secondary applications and skills development funding. They are available to support youth outside of work hours and to provide therapeutic interventions in times of crisis.

There are four **Youth Support Workers** split between the youth involved in basement retrofits (primarily Tier 1 youth) and the youth in the Modernisation and Improvement (M&I) program (primarily Tier 2 and 3 youth). They assist the Coordinator and Project Manager in developing an individual case plan for each youth. They work directly with youth using an intensive support model. They provide supervision to youth on the job and ensure personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn at all times and safety standards are followed.

The **Site Manager** has overall responsibility for the construction schedule and on-site work including Retrofits, M&I and private construction contracts. They coordinate inspections and the work of subcontractors, and order materials, ensure Occupational Health and Safety standards and Certificate of Recognition™ requirements are met. The site manager mentors the Youth Support Workers in appropriate site-specific skills.

GED Instructor: Provides instruction and support to youth seeking to obtain their GED. This individual is a retired teacher who is hired on contract to support youth. Lessons are provided onsite during the workday and youth are paid for their time.

Manager of Social Enterprise: This individual helps Choices for Youth develop a range of social enterprise initiatives, including that of Train for Trades.



A staff member talks with youth participants on a job site.

SUB-CONTRACTORS

Train for Trades also has its own sub-contractors (previously provided by Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation). One of the unique features of the sub-contracting partnership is that if a youth is interested in a particular field (i.e. plumbing or electrical) they can shadow the sub-contractor when they are on site to learn more about it. This can help a youth make an informed decision about whether to pursue that as a career option.

“They’ve got their own sub-contractors, their own electricians and their own plumbers. The stage that the electricians and plumbers come into play is after you do the framing and an inspector comes in and inspects it. Then an electrician or a plumber will come in and move the pipes and do up the boxes and all that stuff. So, when they come in to do that, if you want to go in for electrical or plumbing, they’ll set you up with the electrician for the day. He’ll bring you down into the basement and show you what he does and he’ll get you to do it. He’ll get you the hands-on training and get you the feel of it to see if you actually like that trade and if you want to go in for it. I was thinking about carpentry. Then when I got here, I actually got hands-on with carpentry. They were able to set me up [with an] electrician as well. So I was able to get hands on with both and that helped me decide over the two, which one I wanted to go with.”

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 participant, Train for Trades



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Train for Trades has an incredibly low staff to client ratio (about 1 staff to every 2.5 youth roughly). This means that the cost per participant is high compared to many other programs. The level of staffing provided however, matches the level of support required in the Intensive Case Management process. It does make it difficult to sustain in the long run unless the project brings in enough revenue.

Programs may seek opportunities to partner with existing agencies to increase the level of support they can provide to participants. Alternatively, they may need to adjust their support goals to match their staffing ratio.

"I was thinking about carpentry. Then when I got here, I actually got hands-on with carpentry. They were able to set me up [with an] electrician as well. So I was able to get hands on with both and that helped me decide over the two, which one I wanted to go with."

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 Participant, Train for Trades

EVALUATION *and* MEASURING PROGRESS

Success in Trade for Trades is measured a bit differently compared to many other homeless/at-risk youth programs, which are purely focused on measuring a youth's progress. Instead, outcomes are examined in three major areas:

1. Number of youth completing the program and where they transition to afterwards.
2. Successful completion of quality work for clients (including passing city inspections, maintaining COR certification, client satisfaction, number of completed projects).
3. Progress towards self-sustainability (including projects being taken on independently that do not require additional funding support).

“[Be] very purposeful about what you’re trying to achieve on both outcomes. For us, it’s a bit of a scenario where if we don’t have high outcomes for young people but we have high outcomes in terms of quality of our work. What’s the point? If we have high outcomes for young people but don’t have quality work, pretty soon [there’s going to] be no point, because this is going to disappear. So really, it’s about designing a program that can achieve both.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

A formal evaluation of the project was done in Years 1 and 2 only. This means that there has not been an extension evaluation completed in several years. As the project moves into a social enterprise model (beginning April 1st 2015) there will be an increased emphasis on evaluation. This will be discussed in the [Changes to Train for Trades for 2015-2016 section](#).

Youth

As an important component of continuous program development and ensuring they achieve high outcomes for youth, program staff maintain a high level of connectivity with past clients, whether they completed the program or not. As a result, staff are able to monitor the short and long term outcomes for youth, year after year. The following is a summary analysis of youth outcomes:

| OUTCOME | COUNT | % |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------|
| Complete | 48 | 61% |
| Incomplete | 30 | 38% |
| Incomplete due to Medical Reasons | 1 | 1% |
| Totals | 79 | 100% |

Since its inception, Train for Trades has worked with 79 youth (with an additional 19 youth currently participating in the program). The above table represents youth who are no longer in the program. Of the 79 youth, 48 completed the program successfully, while the remaining 31 are categorized as ‘incomplete’, which includes youth who voluntarily left the program prematurely, left the program for medical reasons, or were deemed needing more support than the program could provide at the time.

| CURRENT STATUS | COUNT | % |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|
| Employed | 32 | 41% |
| Post-Secondary | 4 | 5% |
| Program Enrolment ³ | 3 | 4% |
| Unemployed | 37 | 47% |
| Deceased | 1 | 1% |
| Unknown | 2 | 3% |
| Totals | 79 | 100% |

At first glance, the table above shows a youth ‘success’ rate of just below 50%, if success is defined by either securing employment or pursuing post-secondary education of some sort. However, digging deeper into the numbers demonstrates a very clear distinction between participants who have completed and those who have not completed the program, as outlined in the tables below.

| STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE NO LONGER WITH TRAIN FOR TRADES | COMPLETED | % | INCOMPLETE | % |
|--|-----------|------|------------|------|
| Employed | 26 | 55% | 6 | 19% |
| Post-Secondary | 4 | 9% | 0 | 0% |
| Program Enrolment | 1 | 2% | 2 | 6% |
| Unemployed | 13 | 28% | 23 | 72% |
| Deceased | 1 | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| Unknown | 2 | 4% | 0 | 0% |
| Incomplete Due to Medical Reasons | 0 | 0% | 1 | 3% |
| Totals | 47 | 100% | 32 | 100% |

The impact that participating in the Train for Trades Program has on the outcomes of young people is clear when looking at post-exit outcomes detailed in the tables above. When comparing youth who have completed the program to youth who have not, the pathways are very different.

3 Enrolled in a training or day program at Choices for Youth or another agency.

Of the youth who have completed, 66% have gone on to either pursue post-secondary education, secure employment, or transitioned into the next appropriate program, which is the true measure of outcome success for the Train for Trades team. Conversely, of the youth who have not completed the program, only 19% have secured employment; 72% are unemployed, with none of these youth pursuing educational opportunities.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The program itself is very successful and is clearly able to measure success through youth achievement. However, there is no formal assessment process in place, which is a weakness and presents risk to the ongoing success of the program. Funders, in particular, like numbers. They like to be able to concretely measure success and achievement to establish that their money is being used efficiently and effectively.

All data collected at T4T is done by staff. Every six months they follow-up with youth who have left the program by phone call, text or by reaching out to family/friends. When connection is made with a youth, staff get current contact information and obtain a progress update on the youth's activities. Staff also get together and discuss current and past youth. The information is entered into an Excel spreadsheet so that it is current.

To us, this is merely a baseline of what needs to be done and as a result, we would classify Train for Trades as a promising practice. To obtain best practice status, agencies must be subject to evaluation, especially from external evaluators. The successes (and failures) must be examined. Successful replication of a program is also key to moving from an emerging or promising practice into a best practice.

An intervention is considered to be a promising practice when there is sufficient evidence to claim that the practice is proven effective at achieving a specific aim or outcome, consistent with the goals and objectives of the activity or program. Ideally, promising practices demonstrate their effectiveness through the most rigorous scientific research, however there is not enough generalizable evidence to label them 'best practices'. They do however hold promise for other organizations and entities that wish to adapt the approaches based on the soundness of the evidence. For a more complete discussion of the differences between best, promising and emerging practices see: [What Works and For Whom? A Framework for Promising Practices](#) published by the Homeless Hub.

We also believe that data management software (as discussed in the [Supports section](#)) is important to help track data. Beyond the casual updates every six months we would also see value in extensive exit interviews with youth to determine what worked and did not work for them, as well as qualitative interviews, surveys and focus groups with staff and youth to help evaluate the program.

Evaluation is often an afterthought to program delivery. While funders want numbers and proof of success, they are also reluctant to fund extensive evaluation, which makes it hard for agencies to carry out the level of evaluation necessary. We encourage agencies to budget for evaluation funding and to work with academic partners in the community to obtain evaluations of their programs.

Construction

Train for Trades uses the slogan “On Time. On Code. On Budget.” as part of their evaluation process. This means that they finish their construction projects as scheduled while still meeting all code requirements and inspections. They also, especially as they move towards the social enterprise model, work to meet budget forecasts. A detailed analysis of how the construction budgets are reviewed is examined in the [Changes to T4T section](#).

Since 2008, the following work has been completed:

- » 240 basement retrofits for Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation
- » 4 M&I's (Modernization & Improvement) renovations completed, 2 almost complete (also for Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation)
- » Lilly Building Renovated for Choices for Youth
- » Duckworth Street Renovated for Choices for Youth
- » St. John's Native Friendship Centre Renovated
- » 24 X 30 Foot Extension Completed for MacMorran Community Centre
- » 16 X 20 ft. Garage Complete for Private Customer
- » 40 x 60 ft. horse barn completed for Waypoints
- » Various work completed for private construction company

Train for Trades has had its Certificate of Recognition™ status since 2010. As discussed previously, COR™ is a certification given to employers in the construction industry by the Newfoundland Labrador Construction Safety Association. Maintaining the standards of the COR™ requirements is key to the success of the program. The fact that T4T is able to renew their certification annually is a significant measurement of success.

As the biggest client of Train for Trades, the fact that the Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) has continued to renew its partnership and in fact, has expanded the scope of the work speaks to the success of the program. Dennis Kendell, Regional Operations Executive Director at NLHC, was very clear that the work being done is of high quality and meets both city and NLHC inspections.

“Someone might buy something or a service from a social enterprise once because it’s a good cause. But the only way – just like any other business – they’re coming back two, three, four, ten, twenty times is if you do good quality work. You think about Newfoundland Labrador Housing for example. We’ve done a little over 240 units of energy retrofit at this point. All lived in, occupied homes. We’ve had zero complaints and have been consistently recognized for the quality of our work being as good, or better, than work done by the private sector in the same area.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

"We've had *zero complaints* and have been consistently recognized for the *quality of our work* being as good, or better, than work done by the private sector in the same area."

Sustainability

Train for Trades has been working towards sustainability for some time. The various independent projects they have taken on are key to moving towards self-sufficiency. The ultimate goal for sustainability in a social enterprise is to become 100% self-funding. That is, no government grants, donations or corporate funding would be required to operate the program.

In terms of evaluation, sustainability means looking to see how the program can grow and expand to increase its revenue streams. Additionally, examining the program to see what cuts can be made while still maintaining the success of the program is also important.

Sometimes, ongoing funding from government funders can make up a component of the budget. For example, Train for Trades provides Personal Protective Equipment and tools to youth. Some social assistance and job-seekers programs provide funding for start-up costs, which would be a way of defraying the overall costs.

Keep in mind that complete self-sufficiency is unlikely to happen immediately. Train for Trades received government and corporate funding that has enabled it to operate. While grants can make a program sustainable in the short-term, the unstable nature of funding means that depending upon them is risky.

Certainly this risk has been seen at Train for Trades. The lessons learned, and the progress towards sustainability, have prompted a recent shift in the program to address funding challenges that exist within the organization. These will be discussed in the [Changes to T4T section](#).

Awards and Recognition

Another way of measuring success is to look at impact in sharing the story of the work being done. Train for Trades has been recognized as a successful program/best practice numerous times including:

- » 2014 – Train for Trades was featured as a promising practice in “[What Works and for Whom? A Framework for Promising Practices](#)” published by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (under the previous name the Canadian Homelessness Research Network).
- » 2014 – [Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice– Train for Trades](#) was featured as a case study in this book published by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (under the previous name the Canadian Homelessness Research Network) in the section on youth employment.

- » 2012 – [Eva’s Awards For Ending Youth Homelessness](#) – Innovation in Programming - Eva’s, in conjunction with the Sprott Foundation and Virgin Unite, present four \$25,000 awards annually to community initiatives that move beyond a response that simply addresses basic needs, and that demonstrate significant impacts and help prevent or break the cycle of youth homelessness.
- » 2012 – T4T was featured as a Best Practice Model in Raising the Roof’s report “[It’s Everybody’s Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness](#)”.

*“You can’t get a better opportunity for youth.”
—Dylan, age 22, Tier 3 participant*



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

It is important to be able to prove the success of a project in order to access grants and government funding. With a social enterprise, the method of evaluation may be different than in typical youth programs because the outcomes include both the work itself and the progress the youth have made. Your program will fail if you only have good outcomes in one area and not the other.

Much of this work can be measured simply – did this happen or did it not happen?

- » How many youth started and finished the program?
- » How many youth attended X workshop? X training class?
- » How many youth received their GED?
- » How many youth were accepted to post-secondary education or full-time employment?

However, it is advisable to develop a formal case management system to record the progress of youth through the program. Having a formal follow-up system in place with regular check-in points (i.e. six months after completion, a year after completion) would be useful for measuring long-term success of the intervention. Pre and post skills-based assessment surveys would also be useful to measure progress. While T4T has an in-depth application and interview process that can be used to establish a baseline for the youth they do not have a formal case management system nor do they complete post-training assessments. As discussed in the evaluation section, these can be extremely valuable.

FUNDING

The funding situation at Train for Trades is somewhat complicated because of a large investment from Hibernia Development Management Company (HDMC), which has influenced how Train for Trades operates and has enabled its transition to a social enterprise. This \$2.1 million investment provides a cushion and allows the agency to draw down on the money during transition. T4T and Choices for Youth recognize that this kind of investment is quite rare. The agency recommends therefore that the most useful comparison is to compare pre and post Hibernia investment.

Five years ago (fiscal year 2011-12), Train for Trades operated with 10 youth and an annual budget of \$605,821. The program was funded through:

- » The Provincial Department of Advanced Education and Skills (called Human Resources, Labour and Employment) – 66%
- » Contracts with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation – 26%
- » Other sources - 8%

Expenditures included:

- » Staff salaries (Coordinator, Administrative Assistance, Youth Supports Coordinator and Youth Support Workers) – 54%
- » Youth salaries – 31%
- » Program operations (fixed costs such as training, materials, travel, IT, etc.) – 7%
- » Administrative overhead (administrative fees and office rent) – 8%

The new budget model is examined in the Changes to Train for Trades for 2015-2016 section.

Lessons Learned & RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of these lessons are scattered throughout this toolkit as Homeless Hub Thoughts. This section summarizes additional key recommendations made by staff and youth participants at Trade for Trades.

General Recommendations

- » Understand your community and the needs within in. What are the issues faced by youth in your area? What services exist already to support them? How can you create an opportunity that is unique but builds upon or expands offerings already in the community?
- » Understand the level of complexity in the population that you are targeting and develop the appropriate level of staff supports. Train for Trades uses an Intensive Case Management model to support the varied needs of their youth, including mental health issues, addictions, family breakdown, post-child welfare system, interactions with the criminal justice system etc.
- » Ensure that staff understand how to deal with conflict effectively and have good group management skills.
- » Create a quality product/deliver a quality service. You will not gain repeat business if your program does not deliver what it promises.
- » Determine what kind of program is going to provide the highest chances for later employment success for the youth. Is there a skilled labour shortage in a specific area? Do not create a construction program if there are too many unemployed construction workers already. Maybe the program could be food/catering, sewing, childcare, courier services etc.
- » Be very purposeful in developing successful outcomes for young people and delivering high quality work. Both have to be achieved for the project to be considered successful.
- » Educate potential partners and allow adequate time to bring everyone on board (i.e. union). This will ensure that everyone understands the benefits and that all fears have been addressed.

- » Start small and scale up. Learn what works and what does not. Take the time to work out any issues before trying to get too big. At the same time, plan for scale and understand that your initial resources are finite and you only have a certain amount of time to figure out how to make your program operational and sustainable. Do not simply chase funds – plan to make your program a social enterprise from the beginning.
- » Ensure you have sufficient start-up funds to cover all of the unique costs.
- » Reap maximum benefits – figure out the ways in which your program can contribute to the greater good while providing high quality supports for young people.
- » Do not lose track of the fact that this is a support program before it is an employment program. At the same time, do not forget this is an employment program and the work should be meaningful.

Construction-Specific Recommendations

- » Make safety a priority (especially for this kind of work) including proper Personal Protective Equipment training and supervision.
- » Ensure that within your staff team you have someone with the ability to manage the business side and someone with the ability to manage the project in terms of scheduling, sub-contracting, material management etc. More than a third of your time is often lost on construction projects due to scheduling.
- » Hire sub-contractors directly who understand the program and who are willing to mentor youth.
- » Have staff with a balance of youth worker skills and carpentry/construction skills, so they can manage both sides of the work.
- » Recognize and address the high start-up cost to the youth (i.e. transportation, Personal Protective Equipment, work clothes and safety equipment, etc.)

Why Do This?

- » A program such as this provides an opportunity to reduce the stigma that is often attached to youth and to people who live in social housing. It helps build a partnership with the community.
- » It gives teenagers and young adults the chance and the support they may need to better themselves. The high start-up costs mentioned above prohibit many individuals from entering the work force even if they have the skills/motivation to do so. When they are unsure about direction or how to navigate the system they often cannot get started without assistance.
- » A program that accepts applicants with significant barriers provides opportunities for young people who have been marginalized from the work force and who face challenges that are difficult to overcome. For example, many youth struggle to find employment when they have a criminal record.
- » The program creates a sense of autonomy, identity, empowerment and pride in the youth that it serves.
- » In many communities there is a significant skilled labour/trades shortage. Creating skilled employees who go on to further school or apprenticeships helps address that issue.
- » For a training institution, this program reaches an audience that might not normally be reached and gives them an opportunity to learn about and consider post-secondary education.
- » For a housing provider, it is a win in multiple areas. You are helping tenants and the organization because you are reducing long-term renovation and repair costs (i.e. due to mould prevention). At the same time, you are helping youth.



Brad, a Tier 2 participant talks about his experience with the program.

CHANGES TO T4T *for 2015-2016*

“I used to call this replication, but it’s not replication it’s adaptation - something that fits the size and scope and nature of your community.”
—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

Choices recently decided to make a modification to the Train for Trades model, effective April 1st 2015 (for fiscal 2015/2016). As the bulk of the toolkit was developed using the existing model, and the changes are related to scale of the activities, it was decided to present the model for Train for Trades as it existed at the time of the interviews/research and include this section to update readers about the changes.

The intention for Train for Trades was always to transition to a fully self-sustaining enterprise. These changes reflect that goal, albeit at a faster pace than anticipated due to changes in the provincial funding climate. Changing to a self-sustainability model removes the instability of relying on outside investments and is better for the program in the long run.

CFY believes that the final piece to the development of the Train for Trades Employment Program is to incorporate a social enterprise focus at the management level. Focusing attention on the operational aspects of the program will allow the programming pieces of Train for Trades to be delivered adequately, while managing projects more efficiently to work towards the long-term stability of Train for Trades.

Choices for Youth and Train for Trades staff recommend that groups creating a similar program use the pre-2015/2016 model to get started, see what works and then look at moving to self-sustainability. Over the years, T4T has figured out its scope, capacity and the value it can provide to young people. With this new structure, T4T is aiming to reach self-sustainability by Spring of 2016. It now has the flexibility to expand and contract capacity based on market demand and revenues generated, rather than relying on government or corporate investment.

On an ongoing basis, the number of staff positions may fluctuate depending upon the number of youth in the program, which will be determined by the workload and contracts obtained.

Changes to Youth Complement

The program has decreased from 20 youth to 10 youth effective April 1st, 2015 (four youth are currently transitioning out of the project to meet the goal of 10). Sheldon Pollett, Choices for Youth's Executive Director says, "In the future, like any contracting company, or business, we will scale up and down according to the contact work we have on hand. We intend however, to use 10 [youth] as our base". If new projects are obtained, the model allows for an increase in the number of youth hired.

Changes to Tier System and Workload

The tier model will continue to exist, but the youth will be merged into mixed-tier construction teams so that new Tier 1 youth can be mentored by youth in Tiers 2 and 3. This will hopefully make all of the teams more productive by reducing the overall learning curve of the project each time new youth are hired.

The work will be specialized to skill level, so teams with more experience/expertise will take on more of the individual and Modernization & Improvement contracts, while newer/more inexperienced teams will focus on the basement retrofits. While this sounds similar to the existing process, the biggest difference will be the mixing of tiers in each team with senior youth mentoring newer youth.

T4T is a support program and an employment program. On the support side the goals has been to support a youth's transition into the labour force by providing intensive case management supports. On the employment side, these changes also bring productivity to the forefront of operations. This models real world work environments to ensure youth are more successful when they transitional out of Train for Trades.

Changes to Staffing

Since the changes include a reduction in the number of youth served at one time there is a resultant modification to the staffing model. The position of the Construction/Site manager has been made redundant and the responsibilities will be shouldered by the Project Manager position. By having a Project Manager position and hiring an individual with a background in construction and subcontracting, project management and large scale construction projects, the goal is to bring more industry knowledge to the social enterprise concept. This individual will also have strong insight into the expectations of the industry and can help ensure output productivity meets an industry standard.

One of the two Youth Supports Coordinators positions is being made redundant. As the number of youth has decreased from 20 to 10, it is expected that one individual can coordinate and provide all necessary support to the youth.

One of the four Youth Support Worker positions was also made redundant. The three remaining positions were renamed “Lead Hand”. The new job descriptions for these positions reflect a greater range of experience in construction projects, while still combining youth support skills.

In this new model, with 10 youth and six staff directly supporting youth, the ratio will be 1.66 youth to 1 staff.

The Manager of Social Enterprise position is also being eliminated. The Project Manager, the Fund Development and Communications Department and the Finance Department will assist the Project Coordinator in the roll out of the business plan.

See new Job Descriptions

- » Program Manager
- » Lead Hand

Changes to Funding

Post-Hibernia fund expansion and the 2015-16 fiscal year saw the maturation into a social enterprise budget which captures the difference between earned income and untied funding, as well as a contribution margin analysis (these terms will be explained below).

In this model the proposed budget sits at \$1,679,450.

Earned Revenues refers to money that is obtained through payments for carrying out the construction work. This is estimated to be \$1.3 million and includes:

- » \$543,000 (32% of revenue) in government contracts from Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation for basements and retrofits
- » \$662,000 (39% of revenue) from Choices for Youth to cover a portion of a major capital build as well as ongoing maintenance of CFY buildings
- » \$174,000 (10% of revenue) from private sector projects.

Untied Funding refers to grant funding that is not linked to a specific construction project. This revenue equals \$300,000 (18% of all revenues) and includes:

- » \$250,000 proposed investment from Advanced Education and Skills
- » \$50,000 draw down on the Hibernia fund (the remaining balance becomes a legacy account to serve as a contingency against future business risks).

Expenditures are separated into Cost of Goods sold (variable costs), enterprise costs, social program costs and administrative overhead and total \$1.6 million. The budget therefore becomes balanced.

Variable Costs of \$1.2million (or 72% of total budget), include:

- » 28% for direct labour costs of youth and Lead Hands allocated to projects
- » 33% for sub contractors on projects
- » 37% in project materials
- » ~1% for variable overhead (i.e. Insurance on specific jobs)

Enterprise Costs include fixed costs of operating the training program. This comes to \$ 206,000 or 12% of the total expense budget. These include salaries for project management and business management, training, travel, IT, etc. This is similar to the 2011-12 budget.

Social Program Costs include fixed costs for operation of the social program. This is basically the direct, one-on-one support a youth can access through the enterprise and include a Youth Supports Coordinator, the GED program as well as some small operating expenses. The total cost is \$72,000 or 4%.

Administrative Costs (similar to the 2011-12) includes office rental and administrative fees, but also includes the Coordinator and Administrative Assistant. The total cost is \$192,000 or 11%.

There are two important metrics for T4T - the percentage spent on program versus administration and the contribution margin.

Program versus Administrative Costs: Since the variable costs and enterprise costs together make up the overall training program, together with the social program costs it can be said that 89% is spent on running the training program and providing supports. The administrative costs are 11%.

Contribution Margin: By taking the earned income only and subtracting the variable costs, the contribution margin can be established. This is to determine the ability of the enterprise to generate enough revenues to cover costs and attain sustainability.

The contribution margin is:

- » Earned revenues: \$1,379,450
- » Cost of Goods Sold: \$1,209,457 (72%)
- » Contribution Margin: \$169,994 (18%)

From the perspective of the Finance Department, any future project proposed by Train for Trades must meet or exceed the target of 18% Contribution Margin. There will be some flexibility if the project proves to be a great learning opportunity, but the goal is to meet or exceed this target annually.

Since the contribution margin is less than our carrying fixed and overhead costs, the untied funding is required for 2015-16. However, as the enterprise continues to develop, it is anticipated that enough work will be generated that T4T will be able to cover off the \$300,000 in untied funding through growth in government or private sector contracts. Current projections suggest that T4T will be completely sustainable and free of untied funds within the next five years.

It is at this time that the enterprise will begin turning a profit (in the traditional sense) and producing revenues to be reinvested into future enterprise growth or the wider Choices organization.

Changes to Evaluation

As discussed in the Evaluation section, Train for Trades has not had a full formal evaluation since the first two years of operation. They intend to evaluate T4T as a social enterprise at the end of the first year. This will have two components: a financial evaluation and a programmatic evaluation.

The financial evaluation will be based on examining the success of T4T as a business model and creating a financial forecast for the next year. The programmatic evaluation will include qualitative research with youth and partners.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Train for Trades operated as a typical youth program for a number of years, with a high dependence on corporate and government grants. It developed a strong track record of success both on the youth support/employment side and on the construction end. As such, a decision was made to turn it into a social enterprise.

Running a social enterprise is a good way of doing business to reduce or eliminate reliance on outside funding for sustainability. While the move towards self-sustainability and the social enterprise model was fast-tracked, T4T and Choices for Youth had always intended to move in that direction.

It is important to note that in the new model:

- » The level of youth support has actually increased. The staff to youth ratio moves from 2.5 to 1.6 staff for every youth. T4T has ensured that youth do not lose out by this restructuring.
- » The changes are designed to make T4T more productive and more sustainable. Hiring a Project Manager with significant construction management experience not only will improve job performance but will increase the future employability of youth by giving them real world work experience.
- » The program is designed to scale. If more contracts are obtained, it is easy to increase the number of staff and youth. If the existing number of contracts/workload are maintained, self-sufficiency is still a reality given the lower number of staff/youth.
- » With its focus on social enterprise, it is possible that T4T will become a revenue generator – not just revenue neutral – allowing it to build a buffer zone for slower work climates, or to support expansion.

It is important to note however, the recommendation from staff at CFY/T4T is that agencies wanting to develop their own employment program consider a pilot project first and use the pre-2015/16 model to develop their program and figure out how best to make it successful.

We again emphasize the importance of evaluation, especially during such a transition period. An extensive external evaluation that includes both quantitative and qualitative assessment will really help establish the success of Train for Trades as it moves forward with its social enterprise model.

CONCLUSION

The Train for Trades program at Choices for Youth provides an excellent model for community organizations to look to when planning their own youth homelessness initiatives. No matter the size of the community, the issue of youth homelessness exists and innovative approaches are needed to help solve it. This toolkit provides an example of how to move forward to address this critical issue.

If we truly want to end youth homelessness then we need to move beyond shelters and look at a more holistic approach, including education, employment and housing. Providing life skills and job skills training helps prepare a young person developmentally to be able to live and thrive independently.

We encourage you to see this case study as a starting point. Read, review, pull it apart and reassemble to create the program that will best serve your young people and your location. We hope that you benefit from the ideas and the collected resources to get your program up and running quicker and more efficiently.

Further READING

- » OrgCode Consulting Inc. (2014). A Road Map for Ending Homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador. Retrieved from: <http://www.nlhc.nf.ca/documents/publications/OrgCode.pdf>
- » <http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/community-report-card-state-youth-homelessness-st-john%25E2%2580%2599s>

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**"You can't get a
better opportunity
for youth."**

—Dylan, age 22, Tier 3 Participant, Train for Trades