

The Business of Inclusion

Section 2

Participant Learning

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund



Canada 



 **TORONTO**



The Business of Inclusion
A Series of Reports From the
Toronto Enterprise Fund

www.TorontoEnterpriseFund.ca

The Toronto Enterprise Fund supports the development of social purpose enterprises working with homeless and low-income people. Social purpose enterprises create both community connections and economic opportunities for homeless and at-risk populations by developing businesses that balance both revenue generation and a social mission.

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Canada



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Introduction

The Business of Inclusion is a series of reports documenting the findings from research on the developmental stage of the Toronto Enterprise Fund and the enterprises it supports. The twenty reports are organized into four sections: Background, Participant Learning, Learning about Enterprise Development, and Decision-Making and the Role of the Parent Organization.

This section is concerned with two central questions: “Who can benefit from involvement in social purpose enterprise development?” and “How do social purpose enterprises support the development of livelihoods effectively?”

The Toronto Enterprise Fund focussed considerable resources on documenting the changes in people’s lives that occurred as a result of their participation in social purpose enterprises or self-employment training. This Section presents the details of participant outcomes, drawn from the analysis and learning about livelihood development through the implementation of social purpose enterprises. The learning is based on extensive interviews with participants, on-site observation, interviews with social purpose enterprise staff and board members, and review of semi-annual enterprise reporting.

The purpose of this section is:

- To describe the homeless and “at risk” populations with whom the Toronto Enterprise Fund has been working
- To analyse the context that made participants vulnerable to homelessness, and the implications of this context for social purpose enterprise design
- To identify the dynamics of livelihood development
- To explore effective social purpose enterprise practice in designing and implementing programming to support the development of sustainable livelihoods
- To document the changes in participants’ lives as a result of their participation in social purpose enterprises

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Thanks also to Maureen Adams, Dan Clement and Beth Malcolm, of United Way of Greater Toronto, for their vision, dedication and commitment to this groundbreaking initiative.

REPORT 5

Living with Poverty and Homelessness

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund

Living with Poverty and Homelessness

Introduction

The participants of the Toronto Enterprise Fund are among the lowest-income and most marginalized of Toronto's citizens. This report draws upon the learning from interviews with a sample of the participants of the Toronto Enterprise Fund, and from discussions with the practitioners with whom they work, in order to develop a picture of the context within which all of the participants struggle to survive and build livelihoods.

The Context of Poverty

Below are identified some of the main factors, both personal and systemic, that have made the participants vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. These are the factors that shape the design of social purpose enterprise programs to facilitate people's transitions out of poverty. The graphs provide a summary of the percentages of the 49 people who were interviewed who identified each factor.

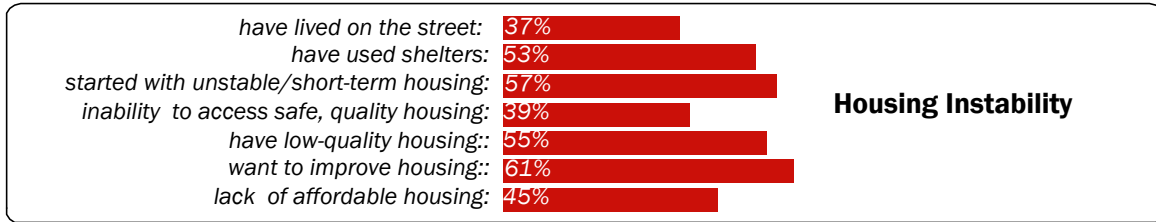
There is a lack of quality, affordable housing

While not all participants have been homeless, all of them fit into the City of Toronto's definition of homelessness.¹ The past decade has seen a reduction in spending on affordable not-for-profit housing, as well as the removal of rent controls and the rise of rents. The people interviewed during this research noted that they have been hard pressed to find and maintain affordable housing of a reasonable quality, and that the wait for subsidized public housing is long. Even after finding housing, participants noted that they have to deal with insecurity of tenure, and the threat of eviction if rent is not paid on time, because they are waiting for pay, and don't have enough money to pay their rent. The research also showed that unstable housing depletes people's assets, while long-term poverty uproots them and eats away at their personal belongings and identity.

At the beginning of the research process, over half (53%) of the sample of participants noted that they had lived in a shelter within the past five years. In addition, 37% of the sample had lived on the street at some point during the past five years. At the beginning of their involvement with the Toronto Enterprise Fund, 6% were still on the street, 27% were in shelters, 18% were in supportive housing, and 2% in mental health institutions. All of the remaining people in the sample were "under-housed" and at risk of homelessness, living in situations of low quality, overly expensive, or overcrowded housing. About 70% of the people in the sample spend over half of their incomes on rent.

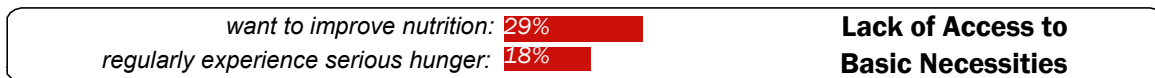
¹ "The City of Toronto defines homelessness as a condition of people who live outside, stay in emergency shelters, spend most of their income on rent, or live in overcrowded, substandard conditions and are therefore at serious risk of becoming homeless." *The Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness 2003* (City of Toronto 2003), page 2.

Living with Poverty and Homelessness



People lack access to the most basic of daily needs

Faced with the rising cost of living, participants noted that they endure poor nutrition, hunger and deprivation. Many rely on food banks and soup kitchens for their daily meals. At the beginning of the research, 18% of the sample said they regularly experienced hunger. The expense of rent reduces their ability to afford other necessities, such as basic supplies for self-care, transit and telephone. They have little disposable income and therefore only limited access to recreation and leisure activities.



Social assistance benefit levels are insufficient to provide income security and meet basic needs

Over half of the participants are receiving a monthly income from the social assistance system, which presents particular barriers to livelihoods development. A quarter of the sample identified Ontario Works (OW) as their primary source of income; participants and practitioners told the researchers that the social safety net on which many marginalized people depend has in many ways become inadequate and inaccessible. The system, geared to prevent fraud, discourages independent and entrepreneurial behaviour.

In Ontario, reduced levels of social benefits have left people on social assistance significantly below the poverty line. According to the National Council of Welfare, “[t]here is simply no fat to cut in the budgets of people who are forced to rely on welfare.”²

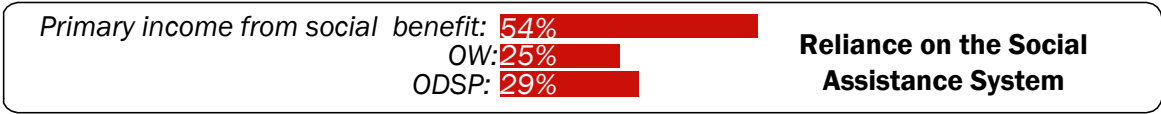
Of the research sample, 29% cited the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) as their main source of income. ODSP provides a more liveable allotment which, if supplemented by earned income, can support a basic sustainable livelihood and quality of life. Yet people are limited in the income that they can earn and are subject to claw-backs if they earn over a certain amount (\$160.00 for a single person) of their assistance payment. Meanwhile, eligibility for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) has

² The National Council of Welfare, *Welfare Incomes 2002*.
http://www.ncwcnbes.net/htmldocument/reportwelfinc02/Welfare2002.htm#_Toc500047787 (30 May, 2003).

Living with Poverty and Homelessness

been tightened. Many people involved with the Toronto Enterprise Fund have serious physical and mental health disabilities that should qualify them for ODSP, but for a range of reasons they have not been accepted for benefit payments.

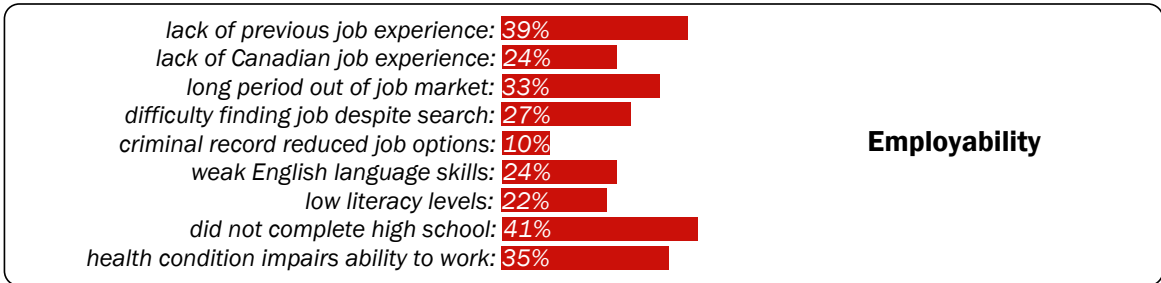
Those people not on social assistance were either underemployed, living on supports from shelters, dependent on family or engaged in informal or illegal economic activities. These conditions increased insecurity, because of the loss of routine patterns and significant exposure to more risk. 41% of the sample had turned to substance use in the past as a source of distraction, solace and escape.



People’s history and circumstances reduce their employability

There are a variety of reasons for which many participants have had difficulty entering the job market. Many people have been disengaged from the job market or have no Canadian work experience. For those who have been homeless and lacked daily routines, it is difficult to adjust to the demands of the nine-to-five work culture. Some noted that when a person has limited income and insecure housing, it is very hard to find a job, let alone retain it. If able to find work at all, many participants would only earn minimum wage, which has not changed in many years and is insufficient to sustain life in the city.

Furthermore, an incomplete education limits choices: 41% of the sample did not complete their high school equivalency and 22% reported illiteracy as a barrier. About a quarter of the people interviewed cited weak English language skills as a barrier to employment.

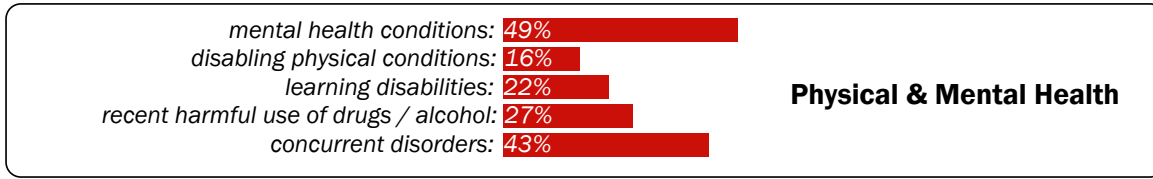


There is a strong connection between chronic health problems and poverty

35% of the sample noted that their health condition made full-time work impossible. About half of the sample population said that they have mental health problems that affect their ability to work. Many people have been labelled “unemployable” by the mental health system. Depression is a very common factor among participants. In addition, 22% of the sample noted learning disabilities and 16% had a disabling physical condition. Concurrent disorders (a combination of the above factors) are

Living with Poverty and Homelessness

experienced by 43%, making mainstream employment almost impossible and substantiating the need for more accommodating forms of employment.

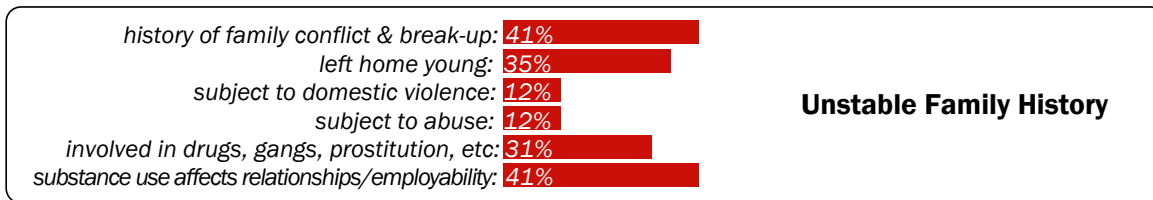


Racism, sexism, ageism and other forms of prejudice exclude people

Some participants noted the effect on their lives of these systemic forces in limiting their choices and access to services and entitlements.

Family disintegration is a significant contributor to homelessness

A very high percentage (41%) of the people interviewed indicated that family conflict and breakdown in the past had contributed to their homelessness. Poverty is often intergenerational, and homelessness can be the logical extension of family distress and breakdown. In this context of inadequate income for rent and basic needs, and lack of privacy and dignity, families experience stressed personal relationships. In addition, many families are not able to create and maintain healthy, stabilizing routines that support children and youth to complete school and lead balanced lives. These conditions continue to affect many participants into the present.



The Experience of Poverty

The experience of living in poverty for the women and men interviewed during this research is summarized below.

Poverty is degrading

The women and men interviewed during this research said that they experienced shame and a loss of identity, wanting to stabilize and heal themselves as they moved from homelessness to a more secure life. Yet they found it hard to build confidence and a sense of self after long periods of destabilized housing and unemployment. At the beginning of their involvement in the social purpose enterprise, many participants had little hope or sense of the future, living continually in survival mode.

Living with Poverty and Homelessness

People feel excluded

At the beginning of the program, many of the people in the research sample indicated that they were very isolated, with few of the connections or supports available to the larger community. Participants told many stories of having only one or two people with whom they were in regular contact. They spoke of feeling that they were continually “taking” from the system, and of wanting to become valued contributors to the community, finally able to give something back.

People are prone to crisis

Because people are destabilized, many become very vulnerable to shocks and crises. In a state of depleted assets, the loss of any one component of stability (housing, health, income, support) can undermine other asset areas. Many people in the sample had experienced health crises, legal problems and debilitating accidents; some were suddenly burdened by the responsibility of unexpected dependents (e.g., family members), all of which made it difficult for them to work towards independence.

Effective social purpose enterprise is rooted in a clear understanding of how poor and marginalized people live. Practitioners devise a range of strategies designed to deal with these contextual factors, in order to stabilize employees and include them in building their own future.

REPORT 6

A Profile of Participants

March 2004

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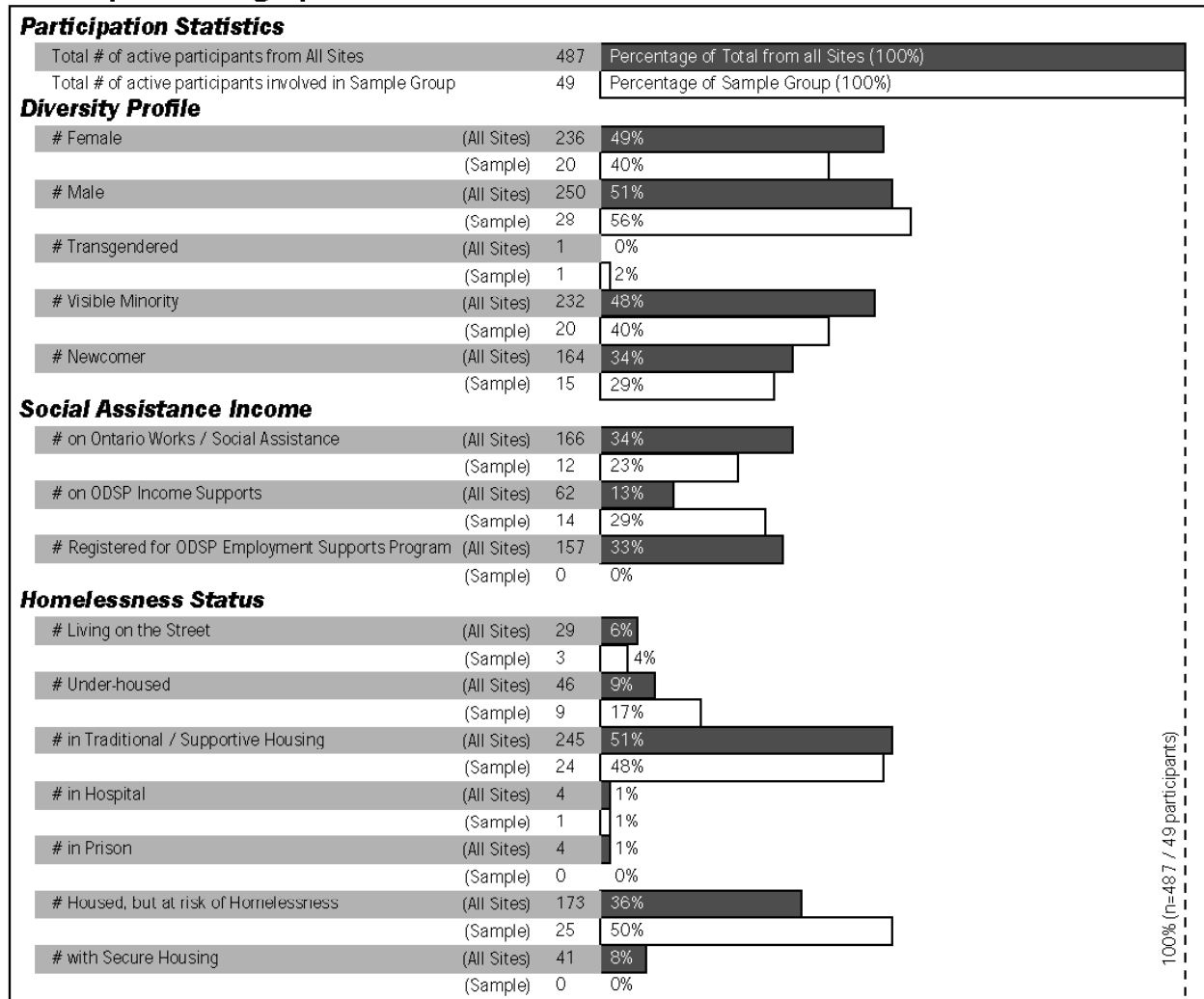
A Profile of Participants

Introduction

The Toronto Enterprise Fund effectively reached a broad, representative cross-section of the homeless and “at risk” population in Toronto. Although the program tended to involve people who were at a point where they were beginning to build a foundation of stability, an analysis of participation statistics and learning from interviews with a sampling of participants reveals that the people who participated in the program are among the most low-income and marginalized in the city.

The diagram below comparing the overall population of participants with the sample of about 10% of the overall population reveals the basic demographics of the people who were involved in the Toronto Enterprise Fund.

Participant Demographics



A Profile of Participants

Housing Status

According to The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001, “people who are homeless include people who:

- Live on the street, in ravines and parks
- Stay in emergency shelters
- Spend most of their income on rent or
- Live in overcrowded conditions, and are at serious risk of becoming homeless.”¹

According to this definition, the Toronto Enterprise Fund was effective in reaching its target group of homeless and “at risk” people.

Four Target Groups Identified

Through extensive conversations with the participants of the Toronto Enterprise Fund, the research has shown that there are as many stories as there are people involved, and that each person brings a unique contribution to the social purpose enterprise or program in which she or he participates. Yet despite these individual variations in history, experiences, strengths and challenges, it is useful to begin to categorize, in a general way, the different populations targeted by the program enterprises.

In the interest of supporting deeper analysis and learning, discussions with program practitioners led to the identification and description of four groupings of the people involved in the Toronto Enterprise Fund initiatives:

- Youth
- Immigrant and refugee women
- People in recent or past contact with the psychiatric system
- People who have been homeless or under-housed for long periods

This report provides a description of the characteristics of each population, as well as an exploration of what made each group vulnerable to homelessness and poverty. These observations are based on our discussions with 49 participants and the comments of social purpose enterprise practitioners who work with them.

Youth

Youth (aged 16 to 24) comprise almost 30% of all participants in the program. Five of the enterprises specifically targeted street-involved youth.

In many respects, the experience of the youth in the research sample has revealed the roots of the problem of long-term homelessness. Many of the people

¹ The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness, City Of Toronto. 2001. Introduction

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interviewed who have experienced long-term instability and poverty identified that the problem started when they were young.

What makes youth vulnerable to homelessness?

Many of the youth in the sample have experienced shocks such as family violence/crisis, or loss of home, family, or support network that directly or indirectly resulted in their leaving home and becoming homeless. Most left high school before completion. A number of these people attributed their difficulties at school to literacy problems and/or learning disabilities.

Once young people leave home, it is hard to find a place to live: they have no previous rental references; they have trouble raising first and last months' rent; and they are discriminated against by landlords because of their age and/or for being on social assistance. So they end up leading an itinerant life, staying with relatives, couch surfing with friends and acquaintances, living in shelters, squatting in buildings, and/or sleeping under bridges. When they do find a place to live, it is difficult for them to adjust to the routines and demands of being housed. Youth cycle in and out of housing arrangements; and once the pattern of instability has been established, it is not easy to break.

“I still feel like I’m walking on thin ice... Things can go down any time... I haven’t been able to pay rent for the last few months – I’m not working.”
(participant)

“A large part of me knew I needed an address to get somewhere. I need to save more before having my own apartment... lots of responsibility paying for phones, cable etc. I finally got rid of it [shared apartment]... I want to talk to people on my own time... I’m going to stay with a friend.” (participant)

“I have my own apartment. It costs me \$840 a month but I have to leave it as soon as I can, because I can’t afford it. I was in a hostel for a few weeks when I came here and then was in shared accommodation with no heat. The neighbourhood I live in is not too safe. There are highrises and fires in them all the time and lots of drug dealers and crack heads.” (participant)

Many homeless and under-housed youth have been actively involved in street culture and the risks and hazards related to life on the street: substance use, prostitution and sleeping “in the raw” can be very dangerous. One practitioner emphasized, however, that many youth choose to continue this life because of its benefits: there is a sub-culture in which self-esteem and reputations can be built, and money made. The practitioner noted that it is important to take into account the powerful decision-making forces at work which can be difficult to understand when viewed from outside street culture.

A Profile of Participants

Most of the youth in the research sample had limited or no work experience. After the freedom of life on the street, they found it particularly difficult to adjust to traditional work hours and culture. This group was more likely to have been involved in alternative, underground forms of employment such as squeegee work, panhandling, prostitution, and dealing. Living in the moment means that money earned is often money spent.

“There is not a lot of legal work for a grade ten dropout.” (practitioner)

Youth often express an underlying anger and frustration with mainstream culture. They feel excluded and have a hard time with society’s expectations and structure (for job, house, education, relationships). Many street youth have been emotionally damaged; they require support, understanding, acceptance and space to “be”, and to explore themselves.

“I protect myself from caring about things. That’s the reason for frequent change.” (participant)

“I’m continually in a process of reinvention. I live up to two years as that invention. Right now I’m in the middle of a big shift. I’ve reverted back to the issues I faced when I was 15 or 16. Dealing with a drug addiction, eating disorder and difficult relationships. But it’s not the same. I’m a wiser person now.” (participant)

Implications for program approaches and design

Practitioners who work with youth tell us that successful livelihood building programs require a sympathy for and understanding of the complex psychological state of street involved youth. They work to create a safe, non-judgmental space, gradually building relationships of trust and a sense of community.

In many respects, linking strategies are the most suitable for working with youth. Their poverty is characterized by exclusion, isolation, weak education and weak support relationships and networks – essentially, weak asset development. Many youth identified the need for further training and education, quality work, strong relationships and new, more supportive peer groups. They saw the importance of investing to develop these assets. There is an energy and resilience to this group, making it likely that with the appropriate interventions, connections and supports, they can succeed.

A Profile of Participants

Once a foundation of trust has developed, programs support progress by developing a range of assets through training programs and peer learning. Most programs focus on supporting youth to plan for the future and to begin building economic literacy and money management skills.

Many youth are not fully aware of the community-based supports and services available to them. Programs raise awareness of services and link youth to a wide range of legal services, food banks, training, counselling, medical and housing services.

Youth must struggle with changing their behaviour, building new, more positive relationships and links to supportive, asset building programs; and often going back to school.

“We need to recreate ourselves. Fear of love, ties, and commitments – success is often self-sabotaged. The rules [for successful work with street youth] are basic – safe space where everyone feels included.” (participant)

Change takes time; however, social purpose enterprise programs often catalyze a process of long-term transformation. Practitioners are realistic about what can be accomplished, and, based on their knowledge of youth, take approaches that foster change incrementally, supporting youth to make better choices and decisions.

“I think we need to be careful in distinguishing between what we'd like to happen and what really often happens. [In other words], to suggest that with a roof over their heads and access to income people will make good decisions around food, nutrition, health etc... is not always the case. It's often a rockier road...we see income spent on TVs, video games, drugs, booze, taxis, McDonalds etc., while rent goes unpaid and food banks are still accessed. There is a whole set of micro-skills around prioritization, budgeting, etc...” (practitioner)

Immigrant and Refugee Women

Immigrant and refugee women comprise approximately 30% of all Toronto Enterprise Fund participants. Two programs are targeted specifically at immigrant and refugee women, and others reach them as a part of a wider target group.

A Profile of Participants

What makes refugee and immigrant women vulnerable to homelessness?

Immigrant and refugee women are generally highly motivated to succeed in Canada. Yet when they arrive, there are a number of factors that hinder easy integration into Canadian society and increase the risk of homelessness. Many refugee women have experienced war and political instability, and suffer psychological scars as a result. In coming to Canada, some women lose the family support that they may have had in their country of origin. Still others survived violent relationships and continue to deal with the psychological and legal consequences. While many of the women interviewed expressed a gratitude for the opportunities that life in Canada had offered them, that sentiment was often counter-balanced by a sense of loss of culture and identity. Social isolation and cultural difference can eventually begin to take their toll. Depression was common among these women. Many expressed a fear of failure, and feelings of doubt and low self-confidence.

“It is very important to get self-esteem – it’s like working on a bridge: you know that it’s safe but you know that under the bridge there is quicksand.”
(participant)

“Being age 45 is scary – I don’t have any support. I’m coming from a culture where all women are dependent. Being scared of the future is undermining my self-confidence – too much debt and uncertainty.” (participant)

“I know that people are sensitive to the clothing that I need to wear and that it will be very hard to get a job because of my clothing.” (participant)

Settlement services provide some support but are not provided for a long enough period to enhance women’s abilities to compete for jobs and integrate fully into Canadian society. These women often have difficulty identifying pathways for change in a country with so many formal and informal ways of doing things. The resettlement process, immigration issues and work permit processes are often complicated: it is hard for the women to find out about and access all the services and supports to which they are entitled.

Women need a variety of supports to aid their integration into Canadian society. Those who arrive with children need access to childcare to allow them to attend ESL classes, appointments and programs.

Most of the women in the sample were on social assistance at the beginning of the program, living a subsistence existence. Rent absorbs most of their income, leaving little money for food and supplies. Of the refugee women in the sample, some arrived in Canada alone and were immediately housed in a transitional shelter. Some arrived with their children; others are now seeking to be reunited

A Profile of Participants

with their children. All made a quick transition to shared accommodation within four months.

Immigrant women experience different kinds of housing challenges. Due to the expense of rent, they are often under-housed, and/or living in housing shared by multiple families in conditions of serious overcrowding.

“I have two children and make \$639 per month on welfare. My rent is \$1050 for a two-bedroom apartment. I get \$294 in support from my husband and have a roommate who pays \$300 per month. I get a child tax credit and that’s what we use for food.” (participant)

“I live in Metro housing. It’s not heated very well and when it’s cold it’s very cold in the apartment, it’s not well maintained and I’ve seen different people with guns. The police are here all the time; the place is not safe. I’m worried about the future with my kids here . . . as far as food is concerned – there’s not a lot of food and we can’t afford fruits and vegetables. It’s very hard for me to pay for things that the kids need at school – like pizza day.” (participant)

Refugee women experience long delays in processing their citizenship papers. Many had gone to legal aid for support with this process. All of the refugee and immigrant women wanted to work but regularly encountered barriers to employment due to a lack of both Canadian job experience and connections. Accreditation for past education is difficult to secure. The women are reduced to “survival mode”: they have to turn to low wage sectors of employment that are easier to enter, yet as a result their income is not sufficient to meet family needs.

Immigrant and refugee women also struggle with their English skills. Since some arrive in Canada without basic literacy in any language, it can take them a long time to learn English. Women tend to build supportive communities of people from their country of origin within which they can speak their own language. While these supports are essential as a coping mechanism, they frequently undermine English language acquisition.

Implications for program approaches and design

The women that were interviewed were very interested in full-time work and preferred to get off the social assistance system, so social purpose enterprise programs designed for this group focus mainly on dealing with barriers to employment. All programs offer training in job and employability skills that will raise the women’s competitiveness in the Canadian job market. All offer ESL training; and some assist women in understanding Canadian workplace culture. All provide the opportunity for on-the-job Canadian work experience either on site at the enterprise or through job-placements in the non-profit and/or business

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community. Programs are aware that access to transportation and childcare is vital, but often do not have the resources to cover these needs as effectively as they would like.

In terms of employment, some social purpose enterprises take a linking approach, working with women who are ready and able to work full-time in the mainstream job market once they have overcome the challenges of acquiring new job skills, Canadian work experience, and English competence.

“In future I want to be able to read the papers that come home from school with my kids.” (participant)

Other enterprises develop parallel businesses to work with more seriously marginalized women, some of whom have lower education and literacy levels, and/or cannot work nine-to-five for childcare reasons yet also seriously require additional income. These businesses offer employment to support women through a more gradual, long-term transition, while also ensuring access to additional income. The programs work to build community and often cultivate peer support networks that can continue after women move into the mainstream economy. Women who are moving out of a situation of domestic violence tend to keep to themselves in programs and require additional one-on-one support.

“The program did have a very good understanding of women who have been in abusive situations. They spent good one-on-one time with me. They were very patient with me (which is very important with women who have lived with violence - I always wanted to quit the program) and supportive. The manager was very educated, like a therapist or community worker.” (participant)

People in Contact with Psychiatric System

Almost 50% of the participants in the Toronto Enterprise Fund are people who have been in contact with the psychiatric system. There are three social purpose enterprises that have been developed specifically for this target group, although at least four other programs also work with this population (to some extent).

What makes this group vulnerable to homelessness?

Many of the participants in the research sample either had been or still were engaged with the mental health system in Toronto. While for the most part they came from different backgrounds, they brought to our attention many common conditions related to their experience of mental illness and the mental health system. Mental illness often forces people to leave their community and family.

A Profile of Participants

This disintegrates support networks, undermining the foundation for long-term stability, and leaves people isolated.

“I feel morally right and proper to kill myself – I experience worthlessness – all the effort put into me has been wasted because I can’t begin to give it back.” (participant)

“My self-confidence has really been shaken up. I keep planning on going [back to the program], but it’s hard because I’m depressed – my lack of confidence – I just don’t know if I can do it... I really don’t want to go on ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program], but it’s hard because of the cost of medication... All my teeth ache. I want to get them all pulled out... I have a reaction to the drugs I’m on. I have hives all the time...I’ve lost my glasses and can’t see very well and I’m paranoid of doing things.” (participant)

“Because of my [condition], I couldn’t help being weird. I get too depressed to do anything – an amount of tension gets generated when trying to deal with people. I’m afraid I’ll say or do the wrong thing. I’m terrified of working because I had rejection in so many places. No matter how much I try to hide my personality, I end up getting fired even if my work is good.” (participant)

Some people have concurrent disorders, combining their mental health condition with physical disabilities and/or drug and alcohol dependencies. Poverty is common in this group, in turn augmenting depression and illness. Many de-institutionalized psychiatric patients are on ODSP or social assistance and find it difficult to find safe, secure, affordable housing on their income allotment. For most, a good quality of life is impossible unless they have gained access to subsidized or supportive housing. They greatly need income to supplement benefits, ensuring access to basic daily necessities.

“On welfare it was terrible – living on \$520/month – leaves you nothing to live on – terrible. I’m happy on ODSP – I need a little extra money so I can survive.” (participant)

“Frustration – I can only earn \$160/month – not enough in my cheque for market rent and it’s hard to get a subsidized space. Then I have to share with problematic people.” (participant)

People told us that they live in constant fear of being “cut off” their social assistance benefits and consequently fear earning and reporting income. Unemployment rates are very high. People have been labelled “unemployable” and find it difficult to find work that accommodates their need for flexible, part-time work with periodic leaves of absence. Most have disjointed work histories

A Profile of Participants

and incomplete education. Most people feel that they can work, but require accommodation and some supports to adjust to employment. It is difficult for them to balance the need to heal and the need to earn income and connect to the community. Medical coverage and drug benefits are crucial supports for this group, but many low wage jobs do not offer these benefits. The need to pay for costly prescription drugs makes it hard to move towards independence.

“I’ve been on this mental health system since 1975 and no social worker or psychiatrist – no one has ever mentioned that maybe I should just get a job . . . when you’re on ODSP – even a very strong willed person will get into that rut pretty easily . . . I need to make \$10/hour to make more than I’m paid through ODSP.” (participant)

It’s difficult to work. My medication makes me sleepy – difficult to get up in the morning.” (participant)

“Working puts a real burden on you. There is more to manage – getting up early/going to bed early, washing clothes, metro pass. I always look forward to the weekends.” (participant)

“Minor part-time work is not really a real job. Insomnia makes it impossible to work full time. I’ve tried it. I want well-paid peer support work 3-4 days/week \$18/hour.” (participant)

Both men and women spoke of their frustration about being outside mainstream society, when they wanted to work and contribute to their community.

“I never used to believe in survivor stuff – and saw myself as mentally ill and that was it. I realized that I’m not that mentally sick in the first place – If I can get up and work then I’m not that sick. They believe that a person is ill and won’t let them do anything – I feel like telling people who believe that to ‘piss off’. Survivors can do as much work as a normal person. We’re all human.” (participant)

A Profile of Participants

“Many Consumers/Survivors have been institutionalized after spending years in and out of hospital. Labelled ‘seriously mentally ill’, they have become compliant ‘patients’ and/or have lost any hope for an independent future. Most, if not all, of their relationships centre on their health status with people who are paid to speak to them. Often Consumers/ Survivors do not have their own communities. It is through working that they develop community, start to display independent thought, and increase their confidence and self-esteem. As one woman said, what we really need is ‘a roof, a job and a friend’.”²

Implications for program approaches and design

Practitioners and, eventually, participants view business development as an entry point for building community and identity. Work does more than provide income: it creates social connections, and leverages pride, self-worth and self-confidence.

In most cases, parallel businesses are developed to accommodate the needs of employees, recognizing that people require flexibility in work arrangements, tailoring work hours to people’s ability to work, offering special work tools and systems, and staying within the earning limits established by social assistance regulations. While many employees will have to continue on public assistance, they require supplementary income to make ends meet.

Leadership development is a critical component of programming. These social purpose enterprises seek to build a movement, supporting gradual change and asset development through role modeling, peer support, and increases in responsibility through internal promotion and leadership training. All work done on behalf of the business is paid on an hourly basis.

In reaction to the medical treatment model to which so many people have been subjected, most programs opt for informal, peer-based, on-the-job learning, with plenty of one-on-one support. These enterprises commonly take an empowerment-oriented approach that gradually transforms employees into active, contributing community members and citizens. The Ontario Council for Alternative Business (OCAB) works with its members to develop the identity of “Consumer/Survivor”³, instilling pride and political awareness in its members/employees.

Mental illness is stigmatized in Canadian society. This population is subject to labelling, which creates public misunderstanding and fear. Many programs have become politically active, working strategically to transform society’s view of

² *Working for a Change – a handbook for alternative business development*, OCAB, 2002. p. 1.

³ OCAB uses the term “Consumer/Survivor”, or “Survivor” for short, which it defines as “Person(s) who have had personal experience with the Mental Health System.”

A Profile of Participants

mental illness by proving that people who experience mental illness are capable of productive engagement with the community and the economy. It is for this reason that the community profile of social purpose enterprises is so vital: working with community businesses and organizations has a much broader impact, improving the quality of life for everyone in the community by augmenting understanding of mental health issues, and thereby creating increased respect and support for the employees.

People Who Have Been Homeless or Under-Housed for Long Periods

Long-term homeless and transitional populations comprise 10% of the participants in the Toronto Enterprise Fund. Two programs are dedicated to working with this group of largely older, long-term unemployed. It is important to note that the long-term homeless are less easily identified as a 'group': there is a wide diversity of situations, interests and needs amongst these people. Many of them who have been severely marginalized from society for years would identify with the term "loner".

What makes this population vulnerable to homelessness?

Whereas the youth population is resilient and has strong potential to break out of destabilized patterns of living, this group has been marginalized and living in poverty for a very long time. It takes a great deal of energy and time to support the women and men in this situation to build a foundation for a livelihood, and we have learned that expectations should be tempered to reflect and respect the choices that participants in these social purpose enterprises make.

Most of the people we spoke to were over 40. The majority of men in this target group have found it difficult to gain access to social income support. After years of destabilized living on and off the street, in and out of shelters, working in temporary, low-skilled employment, people find their confidence and self-esteem battered. They have been stereotyped as "not worth it" and/or incompetent. Many had developed an identity that values freedom, independence and non-conformity over "fitting in".

Most have been disconnected from families and have few friends. Many have not completed high school. While most want to work, many do not want full-time work. They told us that they cannot handle the stress and demands of a traditional nine-to-five job. Because of this, a number were attracted by self-employment.

These people have become homeless for many reasons, but it was clear that they continued to experience instability as a result of having eroded, over the long term, what few assets they once possessed. They remain highly vulnerable to crises, such as job loss or health problems. Most of the men have criminal records, further complicating their access to mainstream jobs.

A Profile of Participants

Drug and alcohol use plays a significant role with this group. Patterns of chaotic use draw people into a cyclical pattern of crisis and rebuilding their lives. For example, participants who secure jobs are prone to losing them because once they have some disposable income they can quickly fall back into high-risk behavioural patterns. Behaviour related to drug or alcohol use may also make it difficult to keep housing.

Implications for program approaches and design

The individuality and nonconformity of this group make peer-based approaches very challenging. For this reason it can take a serious amount of time and effort to engage people in economic activities. As a result, there is a great need for parallel, more accommodating employment. Practitioners in these programs also tell us that one-on-one time for problem solving and learning is vital to success. It is clear that personal relationships with staff provide an essential anchor for participants from which they can move on to begin building other assets.

The main challenge for social purpose enterprises working with this target group has been to identify the social purpose of the business. Both programs had to explore the options and implications of linking and parallel enterprise models, and ultimately decided to pursue more individualized, linking-oriented strategies that support people to connect to the economy on their own terms. Self-employment, part-time/full-time work and social assistance were all acknowledged as legitimate choices. Many participants have ended up income patching from a selection of the above. These programs also assist people to develop economic literacy and strengthen their money management skills.

Formal systems and structure in business and work do not succeed with people who embrace the philosophy of working at their own pace. One program found it impossible to accept a potentially large production contract because participants decided that they would prefer to work on their own projects at their own pace, and did not want the stress of working to a deadline on repetitive tasks.

Most programs either intentionally or unintentionally pursue a Harm Reduction approach, which does not judge people's drug/alcohol use and respects their choices, supporting them to stabilize their lives and build a future without requiring abstinence.

REPORT 7

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

Introduction

Over the past three years of working with homeless and “at risk” populations, the research has confirmed that people involved with the Toronto Enterprise Fund live in severe poverty, and that they transition through some common stages as they work to develop livelihoods. The purpose of this report is to offer a conceptual guide to these stages, and to show where and how social purpose enterprises intervene to support the development of livelihoods.

Personal change is vital to the process of building a livelihood.¹ The dynamics and speed of change vary according to each individual’s base of assets and her or his unique preferences and strategies. Progress is not linear: there are often setbacks, and until crucial challenges can be resolved, it is common for people to get “stuck” as they make the transition between stages. In the case of the Toronto Enterprise Fund, the process of change has been facilitated by the intentional intervention of social purpose enterprises; yet participants themselves are responsible for their own change. The role of programs is to act as a catalyst by supporting goal setting, problem solving and asset building.

In their work with homeless people, social service organizations generally play a responsive role, addressing specialized needs in their efforts to alleviate poverty. In contrast, the social purpose enterprises funded by the Toronto Enterprise Fund have generally adopted a holistic approach designed to reduce poverty by supporting participants to stabilize and make the long transition to livelihood development. This entails building a range of assets: social connections, access to supports and services, income, meaningful work, active learning and skill development

What is a sustainable livelihood? It is an outcome that most of us work towards, whether consciously or unconsciously: we wish to be able to maintain and cultivate ourselves and our households, to take advantage of opportunities for growth over time, and to remain resistant to shocks and stresses from within and without.

All of our lives are vulnerable to external events. Strong, well-educated [people] may have their self-sufficiency eroded by events such as spousal abandonment or job loss. Substance abuse or debt accumulation can destabilize a solid income-earner. Yet in poverty,

¹ “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future”. Department For International Development (DFID), *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets* Section 1.1.

http://www.livelihoods.org/info/guidance_sheets_pdfs/section1.pdf (checked July 22, 2003)

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

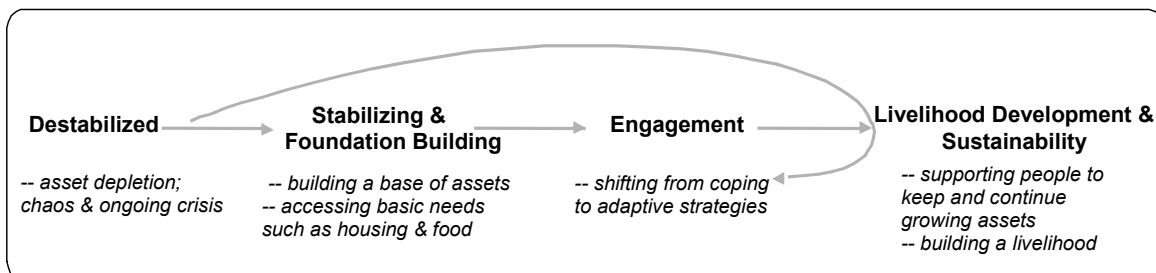
this vulnerability to external shocks and stresses increases dramatically, while the delicate process of juggling competing needs and pressures becomes a far greater challenge. The range of forces against which poor and marginalized [people] must struggle is formidable: low self-esteem, complex family relationships, hostile or indifferent communities, systemic gender discrimination and harassment, unemployment or underemployment, lack of education, ageism, racism, and a daily grind that leaves people with scant energy to contemplate the possibility of transforming their conditions.

It is difficult for those of us who are more privileged to understand the tremendous courage required for them to choose a path out of poverty. Yet we have all been hurt, at one time or another, by external events, just as we have all found it necessary to re-evaluate our personal circumstances, muster our own strengths and skills, and call upon the support of others in order to continue on our journey.

Women and Economic Development Consortium (WEDC), Women in Transition Out of Poverty: an asset-based approach to building sustainable livelihoods, January 2001, p.9.

Stages of Livelihood Development

The stages of livelihood development that were identified by participants in the research sample are outlined below. Practitioners verified that these four main stages present a good picture of the dynamics of change experienced by the majority of their participants/employees both before and during their involvement in the enterprise. The stages include: 1) destabilization, 2) foundation building, 3) engagement and 4) livelihood development/sustainability.



Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

Destabilized

Homelessness and the risk of loss of housing are the natural consequences of an ongoing, long-term depletion of assets. People who are on the street or living in shelters have few physical possessions, but less obvious and more devastating is the concurrent loss of social connections; the undermining of personal security, self-confidence and identity; and the erosion of skills and employability. Life without shelter and access to basic necessities is life without routine or stability.

The psychological impact is severe. When people hit bottom, they have lost so much of what stabilizes and defines them that they find it extremely difficult to rebuild their lives. In this state of asset depletion they live in the moment, vulnerable to all sorts of crises, and struggling daily to survive. Some may choose to access services such as shelters, food banks, drop-ins, and street health clinics, which are all focused on supporting people to cope, and meet the most basic needs. Other people choose to opt out because they want freedom and independence in decision-making; and also because they find the shelter system dangerous and unhealthy.

“People are too severely damaged to hold a job – after doing drugs/selling themselves – you lose your sense of self and self-discipline. I believe that housing is the cornerstone. You need time to heal. Everyone needs a bit of a foundation. It all comes down to priorities – what’s more important, work or a house? If you have no money to have a place, transportation and clothes, it’s hard to keep a job.” (participant)

Social purpose enterprise interventions at this stage

The participants who were interviewed noted that pro-active poverty reduction work cannot begin without first having provided for people’s security, shelter and other basic necessities. Many of the parent organizations of funded enterprises work to serve homeless populations, offering emergency services and supports that ensure basic physical survival and make coping with poverty more manageable. These poverty alleviation programs, however, are not necessarily mandated to build long-term security and stability.

The few funded enterprises that worked with participants at this stage ultimately concluded that it is impractical, and expensive to work with participants/employees who are at the destabilized stage. While it appears that all people can benefit from involvement in social purpose enterprise, a more substantial, sustainable impact can only be made once participants/employees have built a foundation of basic assets and stability. After the first year of implementation, these programs decided

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

to re-target their programs towards people who are more stabilized and able to participate more fully in, and maintain a commitment to, employment.

Stabilizing and Foundation Building

The research has clarified that access to some form of stable housing marks the first step in the transition towards building a sustainable livelihood, and is a prerequisite for asset gain. At the beginning of their involvement in social purpose enterprises, many participants were already in longer-term shelters and supportive housing. Still others had found shared accommodation or private (if low quality) housing units. In general, most were beginning to stabilize their housing but still experienced housing insecurity.

Once a person has a roof over her or his head, a level of privacy, personal care and routine can be established. Food and other basic necessities can be secured, and it is possible to deal with long-term health issues. Gaining access to social assistance income is often the key to finding housing, although it is insufficient to provide for adequate food and other supplies.

Income is obviously important; yet employment income is not often a part of the stabilization equation. Many programs focused on the homeless have discovered that it is one thing to support someone to find a job, but quite another to support her or him to hold onto that job. The women and men that were interviewed indicated that a job can only come after they have been able to settle, feel secure and begin to heal the psychological wounds and insecurities created by extreme deprivation.

Through accessing housing, and basic food and supplies, people have begun to rebuild assets. Nevertheless, they remain extremely vulnerable. Access to additional income, however small, is very advantageous, making it possible for people to take better care of themselves by improving their nutrition, personal hygiene, and increasing their leisure time. This, in turn, builds hope: people begin to realize that both personal change and a better quality of life are possible. They begin to see beyond the daily coping routine, into the future. Once their basic needs are in place, they start to expand their horizons, connecting more with others and thinking about their next steps.

“I feel like a baby – growing pains and baby steps.” (participant)

“[The program] helped get me off the ground, to see where I’m going and to believe in myself. Sometimes I fail but I keep going until I succeed. I’m carrying a lot on my plate. Sometimes I get angry, but I say I gotta keep going. I’m the only one who can do it.” (participant)

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

People are now ready to begin and sustain work routines, although the psychological transformation from the freedom and lack of structure of unemployed existence towards a more structured environment with higher expectations takes time. The longer a person has been unemployed, the longer the process will take. Without the catalyzing role of a social purpose enterprise at this stage, many people get trapped in the structures and institutions that perpetuate dependency and survival-oriented living. If they cannot continue the momentum of asset development, they risk repeating the cycle of asset depletion and destabilization.

Social purpose enterprise interventions at this stage

Parallel enterprises that seek to work with more marginalized populations begin their work at this stage, mobilizing and stabilizing people by involving them in a developmental process of enterprise exploration and group building; and by providing referrals for services and supporting them to access basic needs. Crisis intervention is periodically required. These activities support marginalized people to break out of the 'coping' behaviours, moving them into more positive, long-term asset building strategies grounded in employment and social connections, and providing a foundation for economic and social engagement.

Engaging

It is very difficult to break out of a cycle of crisis and move to a more secure state where it is possible to think about the future and to begin to make connections to society and to the economy. As people reach the stage of engaging, they gradually shift from survival mode to long-term thinking. They begin to re-establish a personal identity and self-confidence, becoming ready for both increased attachment to others and more active, productive use of their time. Housing continues to be important at this stage, as many people move in order to secure improved and increasingly stable residences.

Many participants/employees began engaging by attending community programs, and by starting to volunteer. They rebuild old friendships and find new support networks. Some know that they cannot work full-time because of health and other issues that made them homeless and jobless in the first place, but are still interested in working and making a contribution. Others start to look for work. The search can be long and frustrating. Many of the people interviewed had gone through long cycles of low paying, insecure, temporary employment and then unemployment. For those with low levels of education, finding and keeping quality work that can support a good basic quality of life is very challenging. It is at this point that most participants/employees connect to social purpose enterprises.

By engaging, people are initiating a process of long-term personal change, expressing their willingness to act and take risks in order to improve their quality of life and future. The act of engaging builds a broad array of personal assets including social support, self-esteem, and the re-establishment of family links. We

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

heard that, at this stage, employees/participants could see “the light at the end of the tunnel”. They expressed gratitude for the support they had received, and wanted to give something back to the community – especially to those who are still struggling with poverty. The challenge here, however, is that if people’s newly revived hopes and goals are not realized, they are in danger of losing momentum and sliding backwards again.

“Everything feels better because I live in a house. We moved to a nice area and because of that my self-esteem went up. It’s integration into a community. It’s important and makes a difference.” (participant)

“[Work] gives me experiences that I could think about later on in the week – at times it’s hard to distinguish reality from madness. You know that your work is real – keeps you focused and grounded. It diverts you from paranoid things.” (participant)

“Right now my life is awesome. It’s really taking off. Maybe I shouldn’t be so optimistic.” (participant)

“Training – office work, writing skills, report writing and there are other things I’ve got to learn – I’m kind of nervous – I’ve never done this before – I’ve never stood up and marked flip chart and white board. I’m usually sitting around taking orders.” (participant)

Social purpose enterprise interventions at this stage:

The majority of social purpose enterprises work with people who have achieved a basic degree of stability in their lives. Interventions at this stage cultivate the ability of participants/employees to develop the connections, knowledge, skills and abilities in order to participate in the economy and the community. Programs support participants/employees to grow assets and maintain them, building realistic livelihood strategies that will break them out of the cycle of poverty.

It is at this stage that social purpose enterprises can make the most significant contribution. By offering legitimate work, by organizing people to build community and peer support networks, social purpose enterprises support participants/employees to make positive and important social and economic contributions on their own terms. Participants/employees are encouraged to set goals for asset development and to increase their self-directedness. Practitioners know that it is the individual who will direct and create her or his own process of transformation.

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

Social purpose enterprises' contribution to livelihood development is strengthened by the fact that business development provides an excellent environment for asset development. This research has shown the power of work and income as levers for personal change and employability. Access to work, however part-time or basic, improves employability and can facilitate a connection to a livelihood.

Aware that the context within which marginalized people must seek work can represent a major barrier to employment, social purpose enterprise practitioners have designed strategies of "accommodation" to bring workplace and participants/employees together in a mutually productive relationship. Through this dual approach, both the work environment and the participant/employee are shaped simultaneously to create a new employment culture. Through accommodation, participants/employees gain access to a range of assets while greatly increasing their employability.

Parallel enterprises promote empowerment-based strategies to achieve change. They use employment in the enterprise as an entry point to facilitate and promote new, more assertive, self-confident behaviour. They build on their already established support networks to ensure that participants/employees learn about leadership and decision making. They work to build citizenship skills.

Enterprises that seek to link participants/employees to the mainstream economy begin their interventions at this stage, either by supporting people who are coming out of a state of homelessness to find work and re-engage in the economy, or by assisting people whose assets are depleting to reverse the slide and find better paid, more skilled work. Linking programs target people with fewer barriers to employment who are able to work and adapt to traditional workplace hours and environments. Through skills training and job placements, these social purpose enterprises focus on facilitating a transition to mainstream employment by offering carefully targeted asset development strategies (such as technical and employability skills, strengthened language skills, and practical work experience). These asset development strategies are calculated to remove the specific barriers to employment that each target group faces.

Livelihood Development and Sustainability

A later, less explored stage identified in the Toronto Enterprise Fund is the work to ensure that people not only attain asset development and progress towards livelihoods, but that they also retain those asset gains and sustain them over time.

A livelihood is about more than getting a job. It is created when people have achieved stable access to a holistic range of basic assets:

- Long-term, secure, quality housing
- A healthy diet, household supplies and a basic level of leisure

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

- Social services and entitlements
- A supportive network of family and friends
- Privacy, safety, independence, dignity
- Good health; regular, quality healthcare
- The skills, knowledge and ability to support ongoing productive involvement in work
- A steady, reliable stream of income that can adequately provide them and their household with a basic quality of life

A livelihood is sustainable when all of those components are strong enough to stabilize people through shocks and crises, reducing vulnerability. The assets outlined above are interdependent: no one area can advance without having been supported by gains in other areas. Housing, personal identity, social connections, skills/education and health are all like the legs of a stool: remove one and it collapses. Asset development needs to be undertaken systematically, building up all assets simultaneously and then moving on to another level. While income is a major leverage point for change, it is, ironically, one of the last asset areas to advance and consolidate.

“I’m more involved and more interested than ever before. I want to go on and on without holding back. I can’t quit now. I’ll go on until I can’t do any more. I’m more understanding, more mature and more responsible.”
(participant)

Social purpose enterprise interventions at this stage

It is during the transition from “engaging” to “developing a livelihood” that practitioners still have much to learn. While it is clear from the research that most people are making substantial progress towards livelihoods, in a number of cases people interviewed reported setbacks and reversals after they had left their social purpose enterprise program. More time and resources must be invested to support the transition towards a livelihood; yet more must also be learned about the process of asset building, in order to be able to ensure the long-term sustainability of those assets.

The notion of a sustainable livelihood becomes difficult to define when low-income people can access a social safety net: the question is whether social assistance income can support a sustainable livelihood, or whether an independent source of income is a prerequisite. It seems evident that people on Ontario Works (OW) receive insufficient income to establish a sustainable livelihood. On the other hand, people on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) indicated that while they would like to see benefit levels raised, they can have a reasonable, sustainable livelihood on ODSP when they supplement their benefits with earned income. It is thus possible to build a sustainable, yet humble, livelihood while remaining on some forms of social assistance.

Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise

Given that many of the people who participate in the Toronto Enterprise Fund are not able to work in traditional, full-time jobs, it is important to respect their choices in piecing together a livelihood. In developing realistic expectations of the program, funders had to acknowledge that not all participants were going to be interested in, or able to get off, social assistance benefits through their involvement in the program.

Conclusion

By supporting participants to cultivate a holistic range of assets, social purpose enterprise programs work incrementally to build livelihoods. Livelihood sustainability is about developing long-term assets to achieve quality of life and security. This process takes time, and practitioners are still learning about the most effective approaches, but it is clear that social purpose enterprises play a dual role, developing enterprises and at the same time ensuring that participants/employees build livelihoods. Agencies have found that a partnership approach works well, specializing in supporting people to engage in the economy and society while meeting other individual needs through referral and cooperation.

The report on “Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods” further explores social purpose enterprises’ approaches to asset development, highlighting a range of strategies and effective practices that promote sustainable livelihoods.

REPORT 8

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

Introduction

Social purpose enterprises seek to promote holistic, asset-building strategies to support participants/employees to develop livelihoods as they move through the stages of livelihood development.¹ This report explores effective interventions and practices, used by social purpose enterprises to influence the five asset areas of the sustainable livelihood framework.

Assets are the building blocks of a sustainable livelihood. Individuals and households pursue various asset-building strategies that support them both in surviving, and in coping with the context that makes them vulnerable to poverty, so that they can move towards stability and sustainability.

This research has conceptualized five asset areas which offer a holistic picture of all of the capabilities, resources and entitlements that individuals have invested in and developed over time. It also serves to help participants and practitioners develop strategies and supports to achieve sustainable livelihoods. The five asset categories are as follows:

Social assets

Social assets refer to the supports and connections that people can draw upon to achieve their goals.

- Relationship building
- Organizing people and promoting participation

Human assets

Human assets enable people to engage productively in the economy and in society.

- Facilitating access to work
- Promoting employability
- Supporting the retention of work

Financial assets

Financial assets include economic literacy, earnings, money and financial security.

- Providing access to income
- Augmenting economic literacy
- Building financial assets by reducing debt and promoting savings

Personal assets

Personal assets encompass an individual's spirit and identity, and are characterized by self-direction, planning and self-advocacy.

- Building identity
- Developing independence

¹ See "Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise" report in this section.

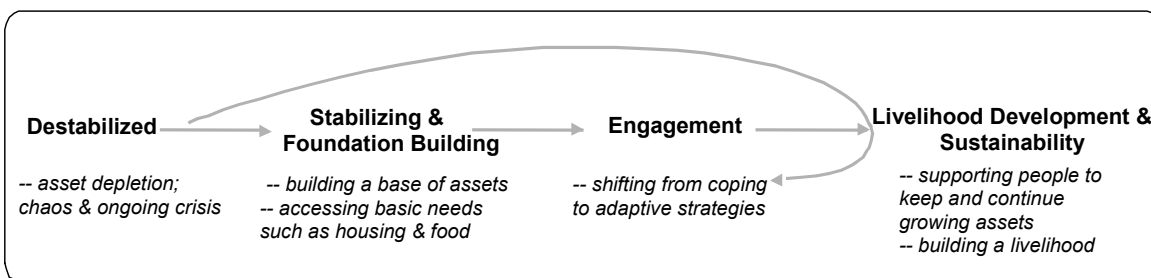
Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

Physical assets

Physical assets include the basics of survival, such as housing, food, and the information and services required to build a livelihood.

- Accessing food and shelter
- Promoting access to information, supports and services

Stages of Livelihood Development



Social Assets – Promoting Social Connections

Social Asset Development Interventions

Stage of Intervention	Destabilized	Stabilizing & Engaging	Livelihood Development & Sustainability
Type of Asset:	Type of Intervention:		
Social	Building Relationships Connecting to organizations Resolving Conflicts, promoting Team Work Organizing for Social Inclusion Through Social Activities Raising Political Consciousness Developing Peer Networks Promoting Representation in Community Organizations Promoting Leadership		

Relationship building

One-on-one relationships between staff and participants are very important to participants throughout the transition towards a livelihood, providing counselling, problem solving and support for crisis management. Social purpose enterprises provide a connection to someone who cares and offers unconditional support. These “anchor” relationships are often among the few personal contacts that people have, building trust and offering non-judgmental acceptance – assets that greatly support the development of personal identity. While “anchor” relationships become less crucial as people build independence and progress in developing their livelihoods, an “open door” policy offers participants the opportunity to maintain these supportive connections, reducing the potential for a backslide of other asset gains.

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

Developing peer networks further facilitates and sustains change. Many programs bring homeless and “at risk” participants together to form groups for learning and/or business development purposes. In addition to offering an efficient way of working and accomplishing tasks, peer groups are a source of affirmation and support for individual participants, allowing them to see that many other people are struggling with poverty, and providing role models for a range of livelihood strategies and choices. Peer groups are particularly important during the foundation building stage. Many participants indicated that their peer group had become, in many respects, like family to them, creating a safe space where they could be themselves and be accepted. As a result, a peer group becomes a forum for modeling and trying out new behaviours.

“I felt I was not educated enough to succeed, and felt – “what can I do?” Then I saw others change and succeed. I could see my own strengths – “If I try, I can do what they did.” (participant)

Parallel programs often use peer-based groups as a foundation for their businesses. They invest a great deal of time building teams and facilitating conflict resolution processes to ensure that a functional, self-directed group emerges. Linking programs often use peer groups to ground a more effective training program. While personal friendships and connections do develop amongst participants, these peer groups tend to end once the participants have completed their training, and the benefits of peer support are lost.

The Ontario Council of Alternative Business, which operates two enterprises supported by the Toronto Enterprise Fund, facilitates leisure activities such as bowling nights and dinners out to further build the peer group connections outside the workplace.

Links to other supports and services are also crucial to stabilization. Many social purpose enterprises are situated within multi-service agencies and make conscious efforts to link participants to the services provided. Others systematically use agency referrals to ensure that participants are accessing the supports and service that they require. Through this referral-based approach, participants can meet a holistic range of human needs while allowing the enterprise to focus on the asset-building strategies directly related to employability.

Many programs identify friendly contacts and mentors within a specific industry or sector in order to aid learning and increase potential for employment or sales (in the case of self-employment). Most linking programs provide participants with links to employers that facilitate the participants’ ability to find work. Some arrange short-

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

term work-placements that offer direct connections to an industry and references to help the job search.

Organizing people and promoting participation

The more activist social purpose enterprises place social participation at the core of personal and social change. Through peer support groups, those who have had a similar experience of marginalization can consolidate a shared identity and culture from which they can organize for social change.

To this aim, many parallel social purpose enterprise programs work to build broader networks and communities of people committed to that vision of change. Such consciousness-raising is powerful, directly engaging people in a world much larger than the isolated one they had previously occupied. The enterprise is thus designed to create a culture or a forum within which people can make productive economic contributions – building a business, working in a real job, earning a decent wage, participating in a community – and become formal “members” of an organization, contributing to decision-making, volunteering for related organizations, and making presentations to the community.

Many parallel social purpose enterprises systematically raise political awareness of the context and structures that keep people marginalized, consciously building leadership from within the group of participants. Some involve participants in their advocacy efforts to support policy change.

Human Assets - Supporting Productive Engagement in the Economy

Human Asset Interventions

Stage of Intervention	Destabilized	Stabilizing & Engaging	Livelihood Development & Sustainability
Type of Asset:			
Human		<i>Improving access to consistent, quality health care</i>	
		<i>Improving self-care</i>	
		<i>Promoting involvement in quality work (paid & volunteer)</i>	
		<i>Promoting involvement in quality work (paid & volunteer)</i>	
		<i>Aiding access to skills/knowledge</i>	
		<i>Increasing Employability</i>	
		<i>Access to paid work</i>	
		<i>Providing opportunities to contribute to society/economy</i>	
		<i>On the job experience</i>	
		<i>Organizing mainstream work placements</i>	
		<i>Access to preferred work</i>	
		<i>Supporting retention of work</i>	

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

Facilitating access to work

As we have already noted, finding real work with decent wages is a major challenge for all of the participants in the Toronto Enterprise Fund portfolio. All of the social purpose enterprises place primary emphasis on providing opportunities for participants to work.

Parallel enterprises move quickly to engage their participants in economic activities, viewing work – however part-time or irregular – as a critical leverage point for both the credibility of the program and personal change for participants. The ability to make an economic contribution and to have that contribution recognized through the payment of a wage immediately generates feelings of pride and self-worth in participants, increasing their stability and facilitating the process of engagement. Ultimately they can move on to more substantial work that builds the sustainability of their livelihood.

Involvement in researching, planning and implementing a business venture also offers participants the opportunity for exciting, interesting and meaningful employment, resulting in a quality of work that most people have never before experienced.

Linking programs are geared to develop the skills and experience that will promote access to full-time, mainstream employment. By working within the enterprise, participants gain invaluable, current, hands-on job experience. In addition, external job placements build experience and contacts to support a connection to long-term employment.

Promoting employability

Social purpose enterprises offer features similar to many mainstream employability programs, such as skill assessment and skill building programs, employment counselling, life skills training programs and job search skills workshops. They also tap into the advantages of their status as a business and employer to catalyze the development of employability behaviours. Enterprises use practical, on-the-job experience to build sectoral skills and knowledge, and to change ingrained behaviour established by long years of un/under-employment. Through real work experience, participants begin to acquire a range of other skills that allow them to adapt to employment. They learn how to organize their lives so that they can meet the daily requirements of work, and they gain skills in managing relationships with supervisors and co-workers.

Supporting the retention of work

Parallel programs design enterprises to offer work cultures and work schedules that are friendly to the target population and make it easier for them to stay employed. These accommodation practices are presented in detail in “Accommodation: A

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Strategy to Promote Economic Participation”. In linking programs, staff follow up by calling participants as they progress through their job placement, job search and into long-term employment. This mentorship, in the form of moral support, advice and help with problem solving, keeps participants connected and strengthens their ability to sustain asset gains and retain jobs, so that they can move towards a sustainable livelihood.

Financial Assets – Building Income Security

Financial Asset Development Interventions

Stage of Intervention	Destabilized	Stabilizing & Engaging	Livelihood Development & Sustainability
Type of Asset:	Type of Intervention:		
Financial	<i>Access to entitlements</i>		
	<i>Supplementing social benefits</i>		
	<i>Accessing regular income</i>		
	<i>Access to earned income</i>		
	<i>Growing income</i>		
	<i>Reducing debt</i>		
	<i>Promoting savings</i>		

Providing access to income

As with getting work, there is something fundamental about the act of earning money and controlling one’s own income that enhances self-confidence and alters the way in which one is perceived by society. When enterprises provide a quick entry point to earning income, they leverage a range of changes for participants: building motivation, increasing interest in and commitment to work, improving access to basic needs, increasing leisure activities and promoting strong personal growth.

Augmenting economic literacy

Homelessness and unemployment disconnect people from money. For example, the cyclical pattern of getting a social assistance cheque, paying bills and expenses and then having no money until the next cheque is not conducive to the personal planning and management of money. Most social purpose enterprise programs use wages as a practical entry point for building people’s understanding of money, and either formally or informally assist them to budget, plan, save and manage their finances. Many programs intentionally pay employees by cheque, ensuring that they open bank accounts, making it possible for them to start to save. Involvement in the planning of the enterprise also trains participants in the basic principles of financial planning.

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Building financial assets by reducing debt and promoting savings

The promotion of debt management and savings are longer-term asset building strategies touched on by some enterprises; but they will need more attention if people are to make solid progress towards sustainable livelihoods. Some programs refer participants to voluntary trusteeship programs, so that they can pay down debts and meet their rent commitments. Others are exploring the possibility of connecting participants to programs such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA) that provide financial incentives to promote savings.

Personal Assets – Enhancing Personal Identity

Personal Asset Development Interventions

Stage of Intervention	Destabilized	Stabilizing & Engaging	Livelihood Development & Sustainability
Type of Asset:	Type of Intervention:		
Personal	<i>Counselling / Problem Solving</i>		
	<i>Building Identity & Motivation</i>		
	<i>Promoting self-direction & goal setting</i>		
	<i>Increasing assertiveness</i>		
	<i>Building self-esteem, pride</i>		
	<i>Promoting self-advocacy</i>		
	<i>Supporting Independent decisionmaking</i>		
	<i>Peer mentoring</i>		

Building identity

People who have been homeless and unemployed often lose their sense of self. Many come to social purpose enterprise programs in a state of depression, hostility and low-self-esteem relating to their loss of faith in both the economy and in social development institutions which have been unable to deliver promised income and independence. How does a social purpose enterprise intentionally build the identity of its participants? From the outset, the social purpose enterprise must capture the imagination of the target population, offering some solution to the challenges that they face on a daily basis, and a reason to begin to feel hopeful. Social purpose enterprise practitioners must design their message to potential participants by emphasizing new and/or more credible employment options for people who have been unable to access or have been “burnt” by mainstream employment.

The immediate connection to income and employment in an enterprise directly builds pride in work and achievement, self-esteem and assertiveness, while also ensuring the credibility of the program. Affiliation with a supportive peer group that has had a similar experience of marginalization reaffirms identity, increases political consciousness and creates solidarity and support. All that remains is for

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practitioners to be consistent, continuing to support and reinforce participant change, while trusting that daily involvement in work and in the development of an enterprise will take care of the rest.

Developing independence

Acknowledging that participants will ultimately be responsible for building their own livelihoods, programs often take an empowerment approach that models and reinforces more assertive behaviour and encourages people to be better advocates for their rights and entitlements. Early support for crisis management is a part of this: staff can model self-directed behaviour, supporting participants to make longer-term, more stabilizing choices and to take some calculated risks.

Social purpose enterprises promote the development of goal setting and self-directed learning, taking a problem solving approach to assist participants to take more control of their present and begin to plan for the future. Participants either formally or informally go through a process of assessing their assets and developing livelihood-oriented strategies that will allow them to build strength and independence over time. Enterprises provide an opportunity to model entrepreneurial behaviour, particularly where the participants are directly involved in the planning and implementation of the business.

Physical Assets - Ensuring Access To Supports, Services, and Entitlements

Physical Asset Development Interventions

Stage of Intervention	Destabilized	Stabilizing & Engaging	Livelihood Development & Sustainability
Type of Asset:	Type of Intervention:		
Physical	<i>Referral to agencies for support/services</i>		
	<i>Accessing housing</i>		
	<i>Augmenting food supplies</i>		
	<i>Improving personal security</i>		
	<i>Ensuring stable, affordable, quality housing</i>		
	<i>Ensuring access to adaptive supports / services</i>		
	<i>Providing access to information</i>		
	<i>Advocacy</i>		
			<i>Promoting access to leisure</i>

Accessing food and shelter

In the case of social purpose enterprises starting at the earlier livelihood development stages, it is important to support participants to deal with the pressing, survival-oriented issues of access to food and housing. Many social purpose enterprises provide healthy snacks at all meetings and some use food breaks as an

Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods

opportunity to facilitate connections among participants and between participants and staff. Most social purpose enterprises refer participants to organizations that connect people to affordable housing. One parent organization has added a new dimension of support to a holistic stabilization strategy by locating the enterprise in a transitional shelter for homeless youth, in order to offer access to employment in addition to housing and basic needs.

Promoting access to information, supports and services

Marginalization cuts people off from the broad range of options and choices that most people enjoy. A great deal of this exclusion has to do with a lack of information and a lack of awareness of rights and entitlements. Many social purpose enterprises use a full spectrum of activities to promote access to services and supports, such as raising awareness, making referrals, undertaking advocacy on behalf of participants and building self-advocacy skills.

Once people are better informed and have begun to set their own priorities, many social purpose enterprises encourage them to enter training programs and go back to school to build crucial assets such as literacy, or to gain a high school diploma. Access to computers and computer literacy is also a feature of most enterprises. The idea is to support people initially to cope with poverty and then to move from coping to more asset-building strategies.

REPORT 9

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

Introduction

The word “accommodate” means “to adapt or make fit or suitable, adjust, to settle.”¹ Another aspect of the definition is to “harmonize, reconcile, settle difference between”.² For the purposes of this program, the term “accommodation” refers to the strategies and practices that social purpose enterprises use to support low-income and homeless populations to participate in the business, and engage in the broader economy and community.

Homeless and ‘at risk’ populations face numerous personal challenges to participation in the economy, such as erratic work histories; difficulties functioning in a traditional work culture; and the need for enhanced technical and employability skills. Long-term poverty and homelessness also create social barriers to participation. As one social purpose enterprise practitioner put it, “The ongoing frustrations of poverty, discrimination and isolation experienced by those on the [psychiatric] system often lead to interpersonal conflict, which makes working problematic for even the most capable Survivors.”³ Meanwhile, the workplace also presents innate systemic barriers to sustained employment by marginalized populations: inflexible work arrangements, low wages and rigid expectations of “professional” behaviour.

Social purpose enterprises have devised and refined an approach called “accommodation” that works to remove both the personal and systemic barriers to work. To create job options for marginalized people and support them to engage in the economy, enterprises work intentionally to increase participants’ employability, and establish a flexible, accommodating environment that makes it possible for people who have been unsuccessful in the mainstream job market to access and maintain regular work.

Organizations like the Ontario Council for Alternative Businesses (OCAB) have created the notion of “alternative business”. “Alternative business initiatives offer individuals a chance to work in an environment, which contains high expectations of performance. At the same time they are accommodated when necessary – unlike a regular workplace. In other words, they offer ‘real work’ but with encouragement, understanding and support. ‘We make the job fit the person.’⁴

¹ Webster’s Dictionary

² The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English

³ OCAB semi-annual report.

⁴ Ibid.

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

Accommodation as a Dual Process

“This is an excellent program. I always feel as if this is a real job. The managers are very nice to us. I never felt like I was less than anyone else. They don’t push us around but encourage us to do more. Lots of learning about working.” (participant/employee)

“We work harder now – no excuses – this is strictly business. I like it – I’m learning to be responsible and manage things. They have very high expectations.” (participant/employee)

“The work is going well – low stress, meeting good people. It is financially enhancing my life, not a drain on my time.” (participant/employee)

Inherent in the “accommodation” approach is the notion of a dual process: changing the work environment to remove barriers to participation while simultaneously promoting behaviour change that supports people to be more employable. Social purpose enterprises must adapt these dual strategies to the particular needs of each target group, creating an appropriate balance between the two aspects of accommodation.

“Parallel” program strategies, for example, work with people who have multiple barriers to employment. These enterprises view the configuration of the traditional workplace as the problem, not the employee who has trouble adjusting to that environment. Parallel enterprises seek to create flexible work with expectations – businesses that support active and fulfilling long-term work opportunities for people who are able to work, but require some flexibility and understanding in their work arrangements.

“Linking” program strategies, on the other hand, work with people who face barriers to employment, and can, with connections and training, fit into mainstream work environments. The employability component thus carries more emphasis in linking programs.

Yet accommodation should not be understood so much as a series of practices as a sensitivity to the vulnerabilities and barriers that participants face, and to the conditions that make it possible for people to work. Accommodations must be designed for particular target populations, facilitating engagement into the workplace and the community; and they must adapt to new conditions and challenges as people progress. Accommodation is about fine-tuning the enterprise to support people’s transition into increased independence and livelihood-oriented thinking.

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

Most practitioners continually struggle with how far to take accommodation. It is one thing to be an enlightened employer – indeed many mainstream employers could learn a great deal from the flexibility and humanistic approach of social purpose enterprises – but it is quite another to become overly protective and coddling. Enterprises working with ex-psychiatric patients are particularly sensitive to associations with ‘sheltered workshops’: they put a great deal of energy into creating bona fide workplaces and use real work as a leverage point for change.

The overall aim of social purpose enterprises is to provide people with the opportunity to work and to keep on working either through linking or parallel strategies. While some accommodations will always be required, most enterprises “raise the bar” over time, increasing expectations of professional behaviour and quality of work as people learn more and acclimatize to their jobs. Celebrating successes is also a big part of accommodation: people need to have their accomplishments recognized and valued; and as they progress, they in turn can be role models for other participants who are new to the business.

Accommodation In Practice

Below, we explore the two accommodation strategies and present some specific workplace practices that have been developed by Toronto Enterprise Fund practitioners. These strategies and practices focus on participation and engagement, and complement the Effective Practice in Building Livelihoods outlined in Section 2.

Designing the work environment for employees’ needs

“Full-time work would be taxing. I went from 8 hours to 20 hours per week and it’s been nice to get extra income. It would be nice to build up a tolerance to be able to work full-time.” (participant)

Clarity about the rules and expectations of the workplace

It is important for social purpose enterprise staff to work with employees and participants to create clear expectations and rules about workplace behaviours. In parallel businesses, participants are frequently involved at the beginning of the business in collectively establishing and enforcing the rules and expectations of the workplace. Linking enterprises work to model mainstream employment practices to the greatest extent possible, in order to support participants’ acclimatization to the working world and its culture.

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

Supportive culture

Social purpose enterprises tend to build friendly, accepting and supportive workplaces that are grounded in strong relationship building, trust and respect. In such a culture, participants noted that for the first time they felt understood and comfortable being themselves in the workplace. This level of comfort results in improved performance.

Timing of work

Flexibility of scheduling is a prime feature of an accommodating business. Many people only want to work part-time, since they need to continue on social assistance benefits; some involved in social purpose enterprises are only able to work during the afternoons because of the effects of medication; some need to be home when their children get out of school; and others require time off for medical appointments. By accommodating these needs, enterprises make it possible for people to participate in the business and earn income. Many parallel enterprises routinely allow people to take leaves of absence from work, making it possible for people who cycle in and out of health problems to retain their jobs.

Supporting the personal conditions that make it possible to work

Social purpose enterprises go to great efforts to remove individual barriers to participation while still focussing on developing a business that can function smoothly. For example, they provide women with young children safe and affordable childcare so that they can work, or offer transportation allowances, or translation services and ESL training to people with weak English in the early stages of programs.

Organization of tasks

At one enterprise in the Toronto Enterprise Fund portfolio, the supervisor realized that it was difficult for people on strong prescription medication to concentrate and complete tasks because everyone in the team of 12 people was using different tools and doing different work. As an accommodation strategy, the supervisor bought sets of 12 identical tools so that people began to work together and in unison. People found it much easier to concentrate, since they could look at someone else working and figure out what they needed to do.

Other enterprises have organized daily and/or weekly work schedules that make the work routine and predictable. Informal, friendly supervision is organized to provide people with advice and support should they require it.

Accommodation – A Strategy to Promote Economic Participation

Tool design and ergonomics

At another enterprise, one of the tasks required consistent accurate cutting. An employee designed a simple tool that made it possible for people with compromised fine motor skills to complete the task accurately and quickly.

Strategies to support people to adapt to the work environments

“It’s like a feather in your hat to be able to do this work. It is good therapy and recreation. It’s to my credit that I’m able to work here and do a good job. I can rely on the hours, rely on the job and rely on the money. I take pride in my work and I enjoy it – I’m nice to people. It’s like personality calisthenics – there are running jokes – we have fun.” (participant).

Working builds positive new routines and behaviours

By going to work regularly, participants/employees are exposed to and learn behaviours that support them to function and succeed in the workplace. Employability behaviours – such as effective time management, improved personal grooming, and dressing appropriately – seem less important and are often neglected when one is unemployed. Incorporating these behaviours into daily routines represents a major shift for most people, and many noted with pride that they are mastering these new or forgotten behaviours.

Time management is a central skill for employment: getting up and to work on time, and calling in if absent or late. Social purpose enterprises all work to build time management skills by modelling behaviour, teaching time management skills and clearly stating expectations and consequences related to lateness. Many social purpose enterprise employers work to accommodate the legitimate scheduling requirements of participants but also expect them to take responsibility for their own personal schedule, all of which prevents last minute cancellations due to scheduling conflicts such as medical appointments.

A structured work environment builds an understanding of expected workplace behaviour.

Many enterprises have built in policies that reinforce changes in behaviour. A “3 strikes and you’re out” policy at one linking organization models the expectations of the sector in which participants will be seeking work: people are asked to learn and follow the expected routines and practices of the workplace and know that if they fail, they will be given more chances to get it right before they are asked to leave.

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Formal training can assist people to understand and adapt to the mainstream workplace.

Linking programs also offer workshops on how to manage relationships in a hierarchical work situation. Participants are supported to analyse and interpret the culture of the workplace in order to make it possible to fit in, as well as to advance to more responsible, better paid work.

Ongoing assessment and counselling support people to adapt to and retain employment.

Constructive criticism is essential in supporting employees to learn and acclimatize to the workplace. Most enterprises offer informal, ongoing feedback on quality of work. Certain participants will have experienced failure at home, school, work or in broader society, and may require more sensitive, carefully paced assessment by highly skilled trainers.

Other components include problem solving and communication skills so that employees can relate to each other in a way that is conducive to a positive and productive working environment.

REPORT 10

Participant Outcomes

March 2004

A Report by The Toronto Enterprise Fund

Participant Outcomes

Putting Participant Outcomes into Context

In the Toronto Enterprise Fund, the target group of homeless and at-risk-of-homelessness populations was broadly defined to include a range of people whose housing is unstable. Four general sub-groups emerged: youth; immigrant and refugee women; long-term homeless; and people who have been engaged in the psychiatric system.

The Toronto Enterprise Fund understands that those who are homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness often face barriers to their economic and social connections to the community. As a result, the fund emphasizes economic and community supports. This has taken different forms in each social purpose enterprise, but in general has included development, leadership development and connections to support services.

Goal and Objectives of the Fund

The Toronto Enterprise Fund developed a goal and objectives that are realistic and achievable in light of the poverty and barriers faced by all Fund participants.

Goal:

To use Community Economic Development (CED) to improve the quality of life of people in Toronto who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹

Objectives:

1. To provide economic opportunity and community connections to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
2. To enhance the capacity of grantee organizations to do CED
3. To enhance the collaborative mechanism for funders to coordinate their resources to support CED for the homeless

Statement of Expected Outcomes:

The program strives to achieve the following outcomes for participants:

- Reduced poverty and homelessness through generation of additional sources of income;
- Increase in periods of earning, employment and work experience, either in the form of community business ownership, part-time employment, self-employment, full-time employment or further training or education leading to employment;
- Active participation in developing and directing the activities of the enterprise

¹ In 2003, the Toronto Enterprise Fund adopted a new goal statement: To support the implementation of viable social purpose enterprises resulting in improved community involvement, economic participation and quality of life of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in Toronto.

Participant Outcomes

- Increased self-sufficiency, heightened self-esteem and improved quality of life;
- Integration into the community through enterprises and through interaction with peers and business mentors;
- Acquisition of life skills and work skills, which increase prospects for employment.

Understanding Outcomes through Asset Gains

The Toronto Enterprise Fund undertook a comprehensive evaluation strategy to document and understand the impact of social purpose enterprise on participants. This evaluation adopted sustainable livelihoods and asset frameworks to assess the impact on participants' lives. This asset framework is outlined below.

Physical Assets: Access to basic needs, services and entitlements including food security; stable, affordable housing; personal security; and access to social services and information.

Participants experienced significant improvements in their quality of life: they stabilized their housing, improved their food security, and gained increased access to recreation and other basic needs. Yet substantial improvements in personal income will be required if people are to move beyond these basic, though important, gains.

Social Assets: The ability to engage in the community and broader society including social connections; peer support; participation in decision-making; and political literacy.

Involvement in social purpose enterprise has had a noticeable impact on participants' ability to develop social capital, which plays a vital role in the transition to increased economic engagement. Participants improved their social supports and networks, and connected to social services offering still more asset-building services. Those people involved in "parallel"² programs increased their involvement in community decision-making. Participants frequently spoke about their pride in becoming less dependent on society through contributing productively to their community.

Personal Assets: Personal identity including self-esteem; self-confidence; motivation; and other emotional resources.

Participants talked of feeling that they had regained their identity and self-worth as a result of earning income through, and participating in, the broader activities of a social purpose enterprise. Enterprise accommodations and programming allowed them to direct their own progress, laying a critical foundation for their ability to build livelihoods.

² "Paralell" programs develop a business that can accommodate the special requirements of the target population.

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Human Assets: The ability to work and to engage in the economy including employability; leadership; health; skills; and knowledge.

Through hands-on involvement in paid work and business development, participants dramatically increased their employability. For most people, the program provided them with their first real, viable, paid jobs in a long time, and the opportunity thereby to develop transferable skills that increased their ability to work. “Accommodations” designed to support people with multiple barriers to hold down a job – such as offering part-time work and flexible work hours – were extremely helpful in ensuring that participants maintained employment. Part-time work continues to be a prevailing pattern in the current program.

Financial Assets: Economic security including: economic literacy; earning power; disposable income; and savings.

Enterprises are chiefly promoting work that supplements, or can be used to “top up”, people’s core income from various forms of social assistance. Although participants did not substantially raise their incomes through working in the enterprises, what financial gains they made have been very important in stabilizing them and ensuring surprising improvements in their quality of life. Participation also greatly increased their economic literacy.

Implications for Participants’ Progress Towards Livelihoods

Through the participant outcomes research, it was evident that low-income people tend to pass through four general stages as they advance towards independent livelihoods: destabilization; stabilization and foundation building; engagement; and livelihood development/sustainability. This is a slow process, with many setbacks and challenges. It is clear that participants do require basic stability in their lives if they are to benefit from social purpose enterprise interventions: it is very difficult to work with people who are engaged in an immediate struggle to find food and a roof over their heads.

Social purpose enterprise can therefore fit in a complementary way with all of the coping services – such as shelters, food banks and drop-ins – that provide for basic needs; yet probably the ideal moment to involve homeless and at risk populations in an enterprise is at the transition from coping to more long-term asset development. To understand the potential impact of social purpose enterprise, one must take a long-term view as the asset gains made by participants through involvement in the program are assessed, and examine how these gains can support people, over time, to move out of poverty.

The majority of Toronto Enterprise Fund participants (with the exception of psychiatric consumers still engaged with psychiatric institutions, and some youth) had achieved at least a basic degree of stability in terms of shelter, food and other basic needs before they became involved. Most enterprises therefore started their

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work with participants by foundation building: strengthening people's ability to move from survival mode and dependence on coping services towards more long-term asset-development strategies. This transition is extremely hard to make; and in the absence of social purpose enterprise interventions, many living in poverty get stuck at the stabilization stage. Their vulnerability to loss of employment, housing and other essential stabilizing facets of life undermines the development of a stable foundation and the shift towards meaningful economic engagement.

Here lies the value of interventions: they clearly tend to build a more solid foundation for social and economic engagement than most people can achieve independently.

As noted above, the transition towards independence is a long-term process. It also requires ongoing support that must constantly adapt to the needs of each participant. At the end of the research period, it was not yet evident that participants had progressed far enough through the engagement phase to be able to sustain their asset gains. One of the important findings of the research was that asset gains can be difficult to maintain once a participant leaves an enterprise. When participants completed their program, many experienced setbacks, and some reverted back to a situation in which they were struggling to remain stabilized. This finding suggests the importance of transitional supports for participants following their engagement in social purpose enterprise.

Further progress in two main areas is needed to support participants to move towards more independent livelihoods. First, more continuity and long-term asset building is vital to enhance the existing support for livelihoods development. Secondly, people require increased income from employment. As stated above, the research found that, for many participants, employment through social purpose enterprises is supplementing basic income entitlements from social assistance. However, many participants are capable and willing to increase their hours of employment and income. The challenge facing many is fear of losing income and medical benefits associated with social assistance and secondly the existing capacity of the enterprises to sustain longer periods of employment.

The remaining sections of this paper provide a more detailed exploration of the participant-level outcomes and research findings.

An Overview of Asset Development by Participants

Substantial research over three years has helped to develop a picture of the changes that occurred in participants' lives as a result of their involvement in a range of social purpose enterprise activities through the Toronto Enterprise Fund.

A sample of 49 participants was engaged in a research process over two years. This represents about ten percent of the overall program population. The findings of the research have been corroborated through conversations with program staff. We

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therefore suggest that the outcomes identified here accurately reflect the type and scale of changes in the overall program population.³

The quality of information emerging from the periodic interviews was very high. The participants provided candid insights into their lives, the crises they had encountered, about their dreams and goals, and about their strategies for building stable livelihoods. The research provided a moving portrayal of the challenges of living in deep poverty, and revealed the strengths and resilience of people living in poverty.

This research has already identified some general stages that people go through as they move from homelessness to stability and economic engagement. Readers should refer to the report, “Stages of Livelihood Development Through Social Purpose Enterprise” in Section 2, which captures the dynamics of asset gain and livelihood development.

The dynamics of asset development are not always positive and rarely linear. The interviews with participants revealed that people frequently experienced progress followed by setbacks: people experienced a cycle of gaining assets, entering a period of crisis, losing assets, and then rebuilding again. Nevertheless, most participants/employees explained that their involvement in social purpose enterprise has had a significantly positive impact.

The appendix provides a graphic illustration of the asset gains achieved by individuals as a result of their participation in the Toronto Enterprise Fund.

Social Assets – *The ability to engage in the community and broader society*

People’s main goals in this asset area:

Half of the respondents acknowledged building family and social connections as a priority, while 20% talked about building friendship networks. 41% expressed a desire to take more of a leadership role once they became involved in the social purpose enterprise. Participants/employees often spoke about a desire to show appreciation for the support that they have received by wanting to help others: 37% noted a desire to help others in the same homeless or “at risk” predicament that they had experienced.

Social purpose enterprises successfully build support networks and a sense of belonging

Social connections play an important role in social purpose enterprises, which intentionally cultivate strong working relationships among participants/employees, and with front-line staff. Through peer networks and building relationships with staff, people were able to establish community and, in

³ For an overview of the research design and methodologies, please see Section 1

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many cases, create a surrogate family. Such relationships of trust and support were particularly important for rebuilding their sense of inclusion. A number of participants noted how this had reduced their suicidal and depressive feelings.

“I got into some trouble with the law and people from the program helped me get a lawyer and got me out of jail. They helped me get back to my apartment.” (participant/employee)

“This program makes you be social. I had no friends before – now I meet smart people.” (participant/employee)

“In the workforce and with my family I felt like the freak of the universe. . . here everyone had a common ground and came together . . . Coming here gives me what I need . . . I have a reason for living and getting up in the morning.” (participant/employee)

Some people developed new, positive social networks. 20% noted that they were building new and more positive networks of friends, while 10% said they were reconnecting with and regaining support from old friends.

14% noted that involvement in the enterprise had encouraged them to reconnect with their families. An additional 14% said that they had increased their responsibility to family, contributing more to household expenses, child and eldercare, child support, and providing guidance to other family members.

The role of peer groups and mentors is significant. 35% of those interviewed were part of program-organized peer groups providing mutual support and understanding. Peer group members noted that these groups are particularly effective for building long-term support. 27% see fellow trainees and employees socially. Many participants have used peer connections to build a sense of family, gaining understanding and acceptance.

Caring relationships are instrumental in supporting long-term stability and building a foundation for sustainable asset gain. The research revealed that those participants who had made substantial asset gains had developed an anchor relationship with a person (e.g. a staff person, friend or mentor) who took an active interest in the participant, who was consistently available and followed her or his progress over time, and who provided ongoing individual support for problem solving and planning.

Participant Outcomes

Participants begin to view themselves as more productive contributors to the community and the economy

Involvement in a social purpose enterprise can begin to reverse the common perception of marginalized people as only “taking” from society. Participants noted that the social purpose enterprises provided them with an opportunity to contribute to their community in a constructive way. Most of the people interviewed expressed pride and satisfaction in the fact that they are now productively engaged in the economy and society.

Strong feelings of solidarity motivate people living in poverty to support each other, even when they have few resources themselves. The experience of working in a social purpose enterprise has motivated many to continue to give back to society by working in social development and supporting other low-income people to cope with poverty.

Personal Assets – *Identity, self-perception and other emotional resources*

People’s main goals in this asset area

At the beginning of the program, most participants were not clear about these goals. As they became more involved, however, and their sense of identity and self-esteem became stronger, they could focus more on personal asset goals. Involvement in the program appears to have stimulated an interest in a broad range of “self-improvement” activities including: building self-esteem (during the course of the interviews, 37% of participants were interested in further increasing their self-esteem) and continuing to learn. 10% of participants expressed a desire for spirituality and/or religion to play a greater role in their daily lives.

Personal identity is enhanced

Loss of identity and low self-esteem are very common for homeless people, caused by a loss of the grounding routines, privacy, and security that most of us take for granted in our daily lives. In many cases this process has taken years to occur and cannot be reversed quickly. 90% of those interviewed expressed a heightened feeling of self-esteem as a result of their participation in the social purpose enterprise. Almost 80% talked about having a greater sense of control over their lives, while approximately 70% showed improvement in self-care (attention to health, fitness, and personal appearance).

35% of interviewees noted an increase in respect from family and peers, and talked about feeling pride and satisfaction at being involved in the development of a positive and productive enterprise.

Participant Outcomes

Assertiveness and motivation are increased

Involvement in a social purpose enterprise increases the motivation and assertiveness of participants. 80% commented on feelings of greater self-confidence and 67% had the feeling that they can now do things and make things happen.

“I’m actually getting to know myself and feel more confident in the things I know. I’m more determined to get things done.” (participant/employee)

“In a funny way I did learn a lot there and that was how to deal with rude people. That helped me because I can handle myself.” (participant/employee)

“Organizations help out but it doesn’t mean shit – you have to help yourself. They provide great resources, but if you don’t use them, you end up at Queen and Sherbourne.” (participant/employee)

Role modeling and peer support, in addition to direct training, all augment participants’ ability to self-advocate both within the business and externally. As they earn income and gain other benefits, participants become more highly motivated to build on those assets and more systematic about accessing supports to meet their goals. 73% of those interviewed were actively demonstrating self-direction by making constructive choices and deciding to develop assets such as literacy, skills, and education.

Leadership is strengthened

Parallel social purpose enterprises, in particular, take a community development approach that innately increases the political awareness and leadership capacity of participants. 35% of those interviewed said that they have become involved in leadership activities and 31% said they actively participated in program decision-making. They expressed pride in this heightened role and in the greater respect of their peers that generally went with it. 37% increased their political awareness of the issues related to their poverty, health and housing status.

Participants from those social purpose enterprises that build political literacy demonstrated more engagement in community decision-making. They became involved in presentations to government, public meetings and involved on boards and advisory committees.

Participant Outcomes

Use of community-based social services is transformed and reduced

Involvement in social purpose enterprise appears to reduce people's dependence on a broad base of community social services. People told us that they had reduced their reliance on public and non-profit social services and health services.

Some participants/employees made extensive use of multiple services at the time of their first interview. As they became better connected to their new more supportive networks and increased personal income, participants reduced their use of drop-ins, shelters, food banks and other services designed to support people to cope with poverty. There are, however, still periodic crises that have to be dealt with as people build stability in their lives.

There was also a shift in the nature of the programs that participants sought out and used: they began to access programs to develop longer-term productive assets (e.g., through training).

Physical Assets – Access to housing, basic needs, services and entitlements

People's main goals in this asset area

Participants were clearly shifting from survival mode to more stability over the course of their involvement in the program. At various points during the interview period, over two thirds of the people expressed a desire to improve their housing while one third wanted improvement in access to and quality of food. Yet most participants experienced a change, over time, in the quality of those needs. For example, from working on a daily basis to fulfil their need for secure housing and basic food requirements, most people moved towards fulfilling more sophisticated needs: increased privacy and quality in their housing, improved nutrition, and more access to personal care "luxuries" such as shampoo and deodorant.

Increased access to and stability of housing

Unstable housing is a major destabilizing factor for homeless and "at-risk" populations. 39% of those interviewed cited the inability to access affordable, safe, quality housing as a major problem. From our understanding of the living situation/conditions of interviewees, we know that 49% were homeless or living in unstable/insecure housing at the beginning of the program (this includes people living in shelters for a limited term). We also know that the quality of housing for people living in "stable" situations is often very poor. All participants are very much excluded from quality housing, and with any crisis could risk losing whatever housing they have.

Participant Outcomes

With the support available to them through the Toronto Enterprise Fund, participants got off the street and many found secure housing. For 29% of the sample there has been a shift from less secure housing into longer-term, more stable arrangements. Through connections, some participants managed to access higher quality, subsidized housing.

Shelter use and couch surfing decreased, although it continues to be a transitional strategy, for low-income youth in particular, to make ends meet while searching for affordable housing. There was an increase in the incidence of participants living in shared accommodation – a common strategy for dealing with expensive rents.

A small percentage of people has maintained stability and continuity of housing by continuing to live with family. More people found their own units. While in some cases this related to a substantial rise in income, in others cases people were willing to sacrifice space and quality of housing for privacy.

“This is the first time I’ve ever had an apartment. It gives me more control, I don’t have to take turns for cooking, I don’t have to ask if it’s OK to watch a show. I have privacy.” (Participant/employee)

Yet changes in housing security and quality were limited due to: the unavailability of affordable, quality housing; high rents; low quality of many housing units; long waiting lists for transitional, supportive and rent-geared to income housing; and difficulty in getting access to subsidies. For the majority of participants interviewed, their incomes had not increased sufficiently for them to afford significantly improved housing.

Decreased numbers paying high percentage of income in rent

Although the cost of housing continues to be a major problem for participants, there was a significant drop in the number of respondents paying a very high percentage of their income in rent. At the first interview, 69% of those interviewed were paying 50% or more of their income on rent; by the final interview, this was reduced to 58%. The number paying over 75% decreased even more significantly, from 26.5% to 7.9%. However, those who improved their housing by moving from shelters, where they didn’t pay rent, to rental accommodation, experienced a dramatic increase in the percentage of income paid in rent when they moved. 10% of those interviewed were able to access subsidized housing during the interview period. By the end of the period, 35% were in subsidized housing.

Participant Outcomes

Improved quality of housing

55% reported low quality of housing due to lack of access to proper cooking facilities, poor personal security, unhealthy living conditions, lack of privacy or the lack of space. By the later interviews, 25% reported a low quality of housing; so well over half of the people who were previously dissatisfied had improved their housing circumstances, while others who had previously been satisfied, now wanted to move. It is worth noting that 27% reported an increase in personal security over the interview period as a result of changes in housing or housing conditions.

Participants' satisfaction with the quality of their housing changes constantly, sometimes rapidly, depending on a number of factors. For example, the need for physical repairs to an apartment or the existence of a difficult roommate can continue to worsen someone's situation, or may be quickly resolved. Perceptions of a living space can alter over time: what was once perceived as a comfortable space can begin to seem inadequate as a person earns more money and sorts out more pressing issues.

There was also evidence of self-advocacy: some people successfully lobbied landlords to make repairs. 10% were involved in landlord/tenant conflict and had threats of eviction. These people went to legal aid to assist them in keeping their housing, getting repairs done, and securing fair rents.

Access to basic needs enhanced

Some people noted a regular and continued reliance on food banks and drop-ins for basic food and supplies. Yet the small additional increments of income earned through work in social purpose enterprises have provided most participants/employees with increased access to basic necessities, and even periodic luxuries (such as eating out and visiting relatives). People generally improved their food security, and have increased their access to basic products for self-care and grooming.

"I've bought a few more clothes in the last little while." (participant /employee)

One fifth of participants noted that improved access to public transit had been a significant asset gain for them. Transit subsidies are vital to participation. People also noted that affording transit is more difficult as they become more active in the community and economy. The cost of transportation was noted as more of a challenge after people had left the program.

Participant Outcomes

While only 6% of people owned computers and only one fifth said that they had access, it was evident that those who wanted to have access to computers managed to do so through their programs, and by being linked through their programs to other services in the community. While most people had access to telephones, 14% gained access to a telephone during the program. One fifth of the people we interviewed have a cell phone as their primary number. This is often due to bad telephone debts. Cell phones are a new feature of poverty and most people who own them use a, “pay as you go” service.

“Having a phone makes such a difference! I have more security. I can call a friend or 911 if there’s an emergency.” (participant/employee)

Increased access to services and entitlements

Over a third of the participants/employees interviewed noted their increased awareness of available services as a result of improved access to information and referrals through the enterprise in which they were involved. In addition, a few participants were better able to access income entitlements, such as the Ontario Disability Support Program, with the support of enterprise staff.

Human Assets – *The skills, knowledge, health, and abilities required to engage in the economy*

The research has found that accommodating work leverages employability, and initiates economic and social engagement. In social enterprise, real work becomes an entry point for the development of assets and builds the foundation for a livelihood.

People’s main goals in this asset area

The people interviewed have shown that they want to work and can work when their physical and psychological needs are accommodated. 88% identified as one of their main goals getting a full-time or part-time job that would provide them with dignified, quality work. Meanwhile, 27% acknowledged that their personal health had been a barrier to finding and maintaining employment; they wanted to improve their health and increase their ability to participate in the program and in employment.

Participation in social purpose enterprises increases employability

Involvement in social purpose enterprise greatly enhances employability for marginalized people, many of whom have multiple barriers to participation in the economy. The majority of participants significantly increased their employability.

Participant Outcomes

The people interviewed told us that, as their participation in the enterprise progressed, they began to establish routines. This allowed them to begin to reverse the patterns that had developed after years of unstructured time when they were unemployed and/or homeless. 65% indicated that they are now able to arrive at work consistently and on time – something they had not done in a long time, if ever. They talked with pride about getting up, cleaned and dressed for work, recognizing the importance of changing ingrained long-term behaviours.

This work is good therapy, recreation – it's like a feather in your hat to be able to do this. It's to my credit that I'm able to work here and do a good job. I can rely on the hours, rely on the job and rely on the money. I take pride in my work and I enjoy it – I'm nice to people!" (participant/employee)

It is clear, however, that many homeless and at-risk people have serious and multiple barriers to employment: age, disability, level of education and the length of time out of the workforce greatly decrease employability, and increase the challenges for the programs that are seeking to engage them in the economy.

Participants are planning and investing in the future

Throughout the interviews, people expressed an improved sense of hope, self-directedness and ability to plan into the future. They had moved out of long-term patterns of day-to-day coping, and could identify and work towards longer-term goals.

"I'm improving a lot, I have much more confidence and I know I look different. I know I can do it – I can get better every day." (participant/ employee)

80% of people interviewed said that they had a more realistic sense of their own abilities and potential, and of the skills they will need to develop, although some staff reported that participants (at least initially) tend to overestimate their abilities and want to progress more quickly than is possible. Participants were keenly aware that employability involves an investment in upgrading existing skills and developing new technical skills. While most enterprises do offer formal training, a great deal of progress is achieved through role modeling and expectations of professional workplace behaviour. Many participants/employees have developed skills that help them contribute to planning and decision-making within the social purpose enterprise.

During the interview period, some people recognized that a chronic, long-term health condition would make it impossible for them to work full-time. These

Participant Outcomes

people noted, however, that part-time work had significantly improved their quality of life.

Participants began to think in terms of investing in themselves and their assets. To upgrade their employability skills or educational qualifications, many (59%) have taken additional courses/certifications and 20% have decided to go back to school for further education. A major consideration reducing employability is that 41% of the people interviewed have an incomplete high school education, making it difficult for them to break out of low-skilled/low-income employment patterns. Participants with weak educational backgrounds appear to have benefited greatly from the efforts of the enterprises to accommodate learning styles and to offer more accessible approaches to learning and skills development. Not only has this approach increased participants' skills and confidence, but it has also increased their interest in ongoing training and upgrading.

"In September I will be starting a child and youth program at Centennial College." (participant/employee)

57% are volunteering at other social development agencies to gain experience, contacts and employment skills. Some volunteer to keep busy once they have met their monthly earning cap on social assistance.

One quarter noted that their involvement in the enterprise had directly improved their literacy, and many said that the enterprise had given them the impetus to look for external support to strengthen their ability to read, write and participate in decision making.

Health impacts have been positive

We have seen profound mental and physical health benefits for people participating in social purpose enterprise activities. People are gaining more control over their health and taking more responsibility for self-care.

"The job has improved my health. It gave me something to think about besides paranoid ideas. I found that I was thinking about work a lot. Full-time work would be taxing but I went from 8 to 20 hrs /week. It's nice to get extra income and nice to build up tolerance to be able to work that long." (participant/employee)

Many people who had been labelled "unemployable" by the psychiatric system have been able to make a transition to active, productive lives. They have

Participant Outcomes

become happier and more vital. 10% of participants noted that, as a result of their new employment activities, they were able to reduce the dosage or number of medications they were taking for mental health conditions.

Many people (especially those more recently off the street and settling after time in a psychiatric institution), talked about taking time to heal from the traumas of their recent experience: 29 people told us that they were focused on personal healing.

“My psychologist helped me a lot with the depression. I’m not seeing her anymore, sometimes I talk to her – we keep in touch . . . I’m happier. I know I can improve.” (participant/employee)

29% noted that they are consciously making an effort to eat better, get more exercise, sleep more and take better care of themselves. Some said that they were drinking less because they were busy, and staying out of trouble.

“I quit everything – I’ve been clean and sober since I came here...I go to the bar but I don’t drink. I don’t have too many friends my age. Most of my friends are dead or they’re still using.” (participant/employee)

People noted that their depression, which was frequently mentioned as an effect of social isolation and poverty, had decreased because of their involvement in a social purpose enterprise and gainful employment. 69% noted lower stress levels, while 18% noted higher stress levels over the interview period. This suggests that the stress related to the daily struggle of making ends meet is reduced, while the stress of coping with the increased demands and costs of participating in work and volunteer activities increases. In general, the majority of people have healthier and more manageable stresses in their lives, but programs should consider how to support participants in adjusting to new life patterns and managing stress as they become more active.

While the majority of participants did have access to family doctors and/or specialists, 4% gained access to a family doctor during the interview period and no longer had to use walk-in clinics or emergency wards. Two people were able to take action to resolve severe dental health problems. Women, in particular, said that access to health and beauty products (such as vitamins and shampoo) increased their happiness and health.

Most participants have engaged in work for the first time in a long while

Participant Outcomes

67% of the participants were newly involved in paid work as a result of participation in this program. For 38% this is their first work in over 3 years.

“I realized I was working. The whole cheque won’t be a freebee. You feel good because you’re working, not just waiting for the sun to get up and go down . . . I look forward to the days I work . . . Full-time? Maybe some day.” (participant/employee)

A pattern of part-time income patching emerges

Linking Programs⁴

Over three quarters of the people who participated in linking enterprises were still working or in school at the end of the interview period. 13% had moved from participation in the program to find full-time jobs, and 37% found part-time jobs. 13% went back to school. 47% remained on social assistance at the end of the interview period, and 13% (all youth) were still living in shelters.

Parallel Programs

89% of participants in parallel programs continued to work part-time in the social purpose enterprise, supplementing ODSP benefits. 44% (with some overlap with the previous group) continued to maintain additional outside part-time employment. Participants/employees in parallel enterprises reported that they rely on income from part-time work in social purpose enterprises to supplement core income from some form of public assistance.

Self-employment

Self-employment appears similarly to create part-time, income supplementing patterns for people on social assistance benefits. All 6 self-employed interviewees were generating supplemental income. All 5 who had started the program on social assistance continued on benefits. One started in a part-time job not related to self-employment.

People are dependent on public benefits for their basic survival and are using their involvement in social purpose enterprise to make up the shortfall in their public benefits income, thus more effectively meeting their basic needs.

Accommodation strategies improve the quality of work

The people interviewed told us that they wanted to find meaningful, quality work that they would enjoy. Over the course of the interviews, it became clear that job satisfaction had as much to do with workplace culture and expectations as it did with the type of work provided.¹

⁴ Linking programs provide transitional job experience and programs that build employability and other livelihood assets to link the target population to the mainstream economy.

Participant Outcomes

The kind of work created by social purpose enterprises is often basic; but accommodating workplaces and employment policies make it more humane and interesting for participants. In the case of box washing, for example, efforts were made to create a positive, welcoming community for participants/employees, building teamwork, providing food and increasing skills over time. As a result, this menial work has been well received and participating employees have had a positive experience.

It is important to note that underemployed people's employment status is constantly changing as they piece together the income for survival. They may move back and forth from having no visible means of support and living in shelters to finding part-time employment, day jobs, commission, family support or some combination of the above. As a result it has been very difficult to arrive at definitive employment statistics for the sample.

Keeping work

As a consequence of accommodation and job satisfaction, people are increasing their ability to retain employment. 49% reported that they had found work that they enjoy. 35% recognized that the social purpose enterprise had provided specific accommodations to assist them in keeping their jobs. 29% noted that it was the first time in a long while that they had stuck to a task and/or completed a program. 20% increased their supervisory responsibility within the social purpose enterprise over the period of their involvement. In some cases, however, promotions have not worked out, creating setbacks for participants.

Sustainable Livelihoods are still a distant prospect

In linking programs, participants' involvement in the social purpose enterprise, while very beneficial and useful, has not guaranteed mainstream employment. Participants are not always clear about how they will find employment after their involvement in training and/or work placements. People reported that although they had received support to find work during the months immediately after they had left the training program, this job search support or support to help them retain work already found did not continue. Of those people who successfully make the transition to mainstream employment, some are getting trapped in patterns of temporary or part-time work and "survival" jobs.

Many participants in parallel programs do not think part-time employment and the ability to supplement social assistance income are enough to satisfy their needs. As their skills, experience and confidence build, participants reported that they want to move on towards the independence and dignity of full-time employment. They desire stable, secure, long-term work that will allow them to get off social assistance benefits and enjoy an improved quality of life, while maintaining the security of access to drug benefits. Many would be capable of working full-time if their employer could provide an accommodating work

Participant Outcomes

environment, and if there was flexibility to allow people to take periodic leaves as health problems arise.

“My psychiatrist never mentioned going back to work – never encouraged me ... They don’t encourage you to work in a full-time job just little jobs ... that’s as far as you’re going. You’re not going to go past that ... half of the people who work or volunteer here are similar and would like full- time jobs.” (participant/employee)

Financial Assets – *The economic literacy, earning power, disposable income and savings required for economic security*

People’s main goals in this asset area:

Again, people’s financial goals became clearer and more sophisticated over time. Early goals in this asset area focused on survival (35% wanted more money to meet basic needs) and/or unrealistic desires for instant security (e.g. winning the lottery). Over time, people became more focussed on income earning as a realistic option. More than half (57%) wanted an increase in earned income, some wanting to go beyond what they were already earning in social purpose enterprise programs. Participants also became more interested in having a little disposable income for recreation and family commitments (10% wanted to increase their disposable income for trips and leisure activities). Some were working to build their long-term financial security: 4% were working to improve their credit rating.

Of the people we interviewed, 10% wanted to get on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works (OW), while another 10% wanted to work their way off social assistance benefits. During their involvement in the Toronto Enterprise Fund, a greater number of participants/employees were beginning to set this as a goal, although they had trouble seeing how they could navigate the restrictions and claw backs in order to make it happen.

Participants are coping with extreme poverty

Our interviews with participants/employees of social purpose enterprises funded by the Toronto Enterprise Fund confirm that people are living in extreme poverty. They have very low income with insufficient resources to pay rent and eat.

Their sources of income were generally public benefits and entitlements. More than half of the people participating in this research were on some form of social assistance benefits: 12 (24%) were on Ontario Works and 14 (29%) on ODSP. There was little change in income source over the course of the program. For 11%, a basic needs allowance from a shelter was their primary source of

Participant Outcomes

income. This percentage did not change between the first and last interviews, although the individuals reporting were different. Mothers with children reported the Child Tax Benefit as an important secondary source of income, providing money to meet the basic needs of the family.

At the beginning of the interview process it became apparent that the monthly income for the majority of the people was very low: most participants (with the exception of those few people who were living in couples or with dependent children) were living on \$1000 per month or less. People on ODSP are in the best financial situation, with \$932/month for a single person. People on Ontario Works are very marginalized: the single person allotment is \$350/month. Some participants had no visible source of income or were living on shelter allowances.

Increased economic literacy

27% of those interviewed said that involvement in the business increased their awareness and understanding of money and the economy. 14% noted as a direct result of their involvement in the business that they developed financial management skills and are better at managing their personal finances.

Most social purpose enterprises pay employees with cheques that have deductions, while some enterprises make direct deposits to people's bank accounts. 14% opened bank accounts as a result of their involvement in the program.

“My life has improved – they taught me how to manage my income – every penny is valuable. I'm trying to maintain employment, save as much as I can so I never have to resort to homeless supports and that kind of thing again.”
(participant/employee)

Although small, earned income through social purpose enterprise is indispensable

In the research sample, 84% earned income as a direct result of involvement in the Toronto Enterprise Fund programs and enterprises (including those on honoraria). Approximately 58% were still earning income at the end of the interview period, and over this period, 52.9% of the participants interviewed reported an increase in income. 20% reported a decrease in income. This was a transitional factor: some participants earned money during the program but experienced a decline when their involvement ended. Many people are working for very little additional money because they have to stay on social assistance for health reasons.

Participant Outcomes

In most cases, improvements in income were small, amounting to one to two hundred dollars per month. Yet, this additional income acts as a leverage point for significant changes in personal and human assets. People were able to meet more basic needs and thereby improve their basic standard of living.

Almost half (45%) of the participants said that they now have enough money to meet basic needs, and an additional 45% noted that they have improved disposable income. 16% had made loans to friends and associates, although this is more a reflection of the culture of solidarity of people living in poverty than of increased assets.

“I bought my own piece of pie rather than an ODSP piece of pie.”
(participant/employee)

The income increases made it possible for one interviewee to afford the first family trip home in six years to a city only two hours from Toronto. When another participant was asked what he was going to do with his first paycheque, he said that he was going to buy a new pair of shoes. He had found the only shoes he owned on the street; they were too small and caused him severe discomfort.

People have become dependent on this part-time income to support an improved standard of living within the social assistance system: if the business cannot provide that work consistently, they face hardship. In the case of seasonal businesses, a number of interviewees said that they had become dependent on the supplemental income and that they had suffered during the winter months without it.

Earned income is predominantly a secondary source of income

At this stage of development of the Toronto Enterprise Fund, the parallel social purpose enterprises and self-employment programming have mainly supported income supplementation strategies for participants who are mostly on some form of social assistance. Most participants have been restricted by the terms of social assistance, and many are choosing to work only the allowed number of hours so that their social assistance payments are not clawed back.

Furthermore, a significant number of people from the sample (22%) had not stabilized their income source and were still homeless or seriously at risk. At the end of the interview period they were not on social assistance, still unemployed or underemployed and living in constant upheaval and insecurity (e.g., on shelter allowances, on marginal income from commission work, or surviving on irregular handouts from family). Most of these less stable people were youth.

Participant Outcomes

Dependence on social assistance as core income has been decreased only slightly

44% of interviewees have been on benefits for longer than 5 years. People who have been on social assistance for a very long time take far longer to move off it than does a person who has recently started to receive it. This is why longer-term programming is essential to change ingrained patterns of dependence.

Of those on Ontario Works at the beginning of the interview process, 8% have moved off. 4% were temporarily off ODSP as a result of participation in management of a social purpose enterprise. 8% of the overall sample moved from Ontario Works to ODSP. 6% were disqualified from social benefits during the interview period.

Some of those people on Ontario Works who were able to move off benefits as a result of their involvement in income earning activities told us that they had made the move too quickly. They found it difficult to make ends meet, and to cope without health benefits.

2 people got off ODSP while they worked full-time for the social purpose enterprise, but these changes were temporary, lasting only as long as the business was able to pay them. One person was unwillingly taken off ODSP because he did not meet his reporting requirements properly.

Savings and debt

The majority of participants were locked into a monthly cycle revolving around the social assistance cheque, without enough money to make ends meet, and struggling constantly to keep everything together. Most of the earned income goes into consumables to improve their immediate standard of living. They are only beginning to build financial assets.

Nonetheless, 64% had no savings at the beginning of the interview period, as opposed to 46% at the end. The savings are small: only 5 people have over \$2500 saved. 28% reported an increase in savings over the period. 8% reported a decrease, while 65% reported no change.

“I’m contributing toward my burial expenses at \$50/month. In 2003 it will be paid.” (participant/employee)

In terms of personal debt, participants were able to reduce their debts somewhat, although some were increasing their debts as a result of moving to a

Participant Outcomes

new stage: 21% reported a decrease in debt over the interview period, while 13% reported an increase and 67% no change.

It is important to note that a substantial portion of the population had no debt to begin with. The percentage reporting no debt in the first interview was 63%. More than half of those interviewed have been on social assistance for more than 5 years and have stabilized or resolved issues of debt.

For the majority of participants in debt, this was a reflection of their history of poverty and crisis. People reported credit card and telephone debt most frequently. One person has a \$3000 Bell bill and assumes he will never be able to have a telephone in his name again. However, progress has its costs and a few participants were financing their futures based on debt. One participant was accumulating substantial OSAP debt as she went through schools and others had accumulated debts in order to finance their self-employed businesses.

Conclusion

This document represents a summary of the Toronto Enterprise Fund's learning about outcomes using an asset-based model. This model was valuable to deconstruct the different assets that people living in poverty develop as they build livelihoods. As we draw conclusions about the progress that participants have made, it seems fitting to reconstruct the results, pulling all the elements back together in order to assess the value of the social purpose enterprise approach in building livelihoods with homeless and at risk populations.

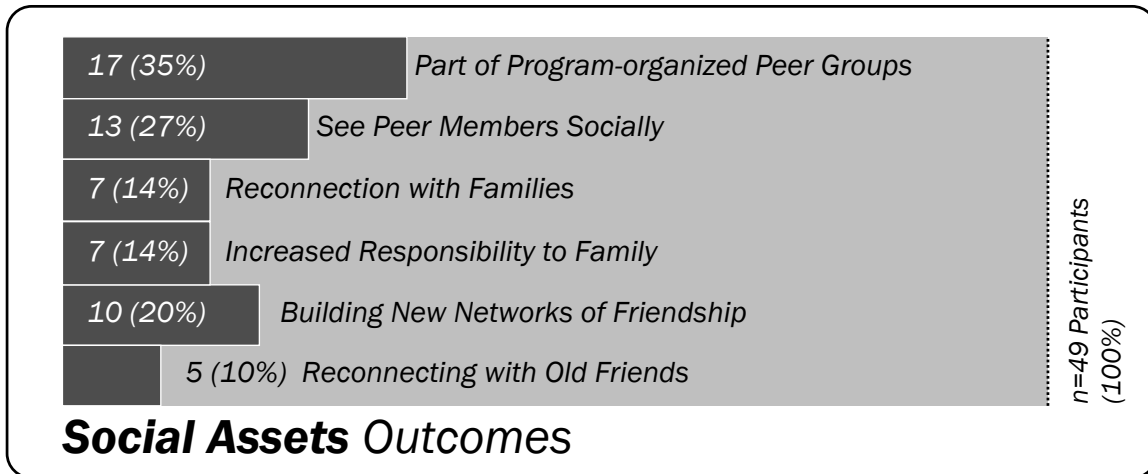
This project has produced dramatic asset gains in less tangible areas such as: social connections, personal identity, political and economic literacy, food security, and stability of housing. Many of the participants/employees have developed a solid foundation of assets and have progressed towards more stable livelihoods. This foundation is still vulnerable and participants' livelihoods are precarious. The very small amounts of money they earned through the project markedly increased their quality of life, but proved insufficient to get them off social assistance, and the work they do is not yet stable and reliable in the long-term.

Yet it is important to keep these results in perspective. Toronto Enterprise Fund programs achieved the overall goal of improving participants' connections to the community and the economy, and also clearly secured an improved quality of life for the vast majority of participants. The social purpose enterprise approach has already proven its great potential for building livelihoods and social inclusion.

In the current context of limited supply of affordable housing and policy constraints limiting the amount of earned income for participants on social assistance, the capacity of social purpose enterprise to help people make sustained improvement in income will be constrained. However, enterprises can improve their capacity to support the transition of participants from their involvement in the enterprise to more mainstream employment.

Participant Outcomes Appendix: Charts of Asset Gains

Social Assets: *The ability to engage in the community and broader society* including social connections; peer support; participation in decision-making; and political literacy.

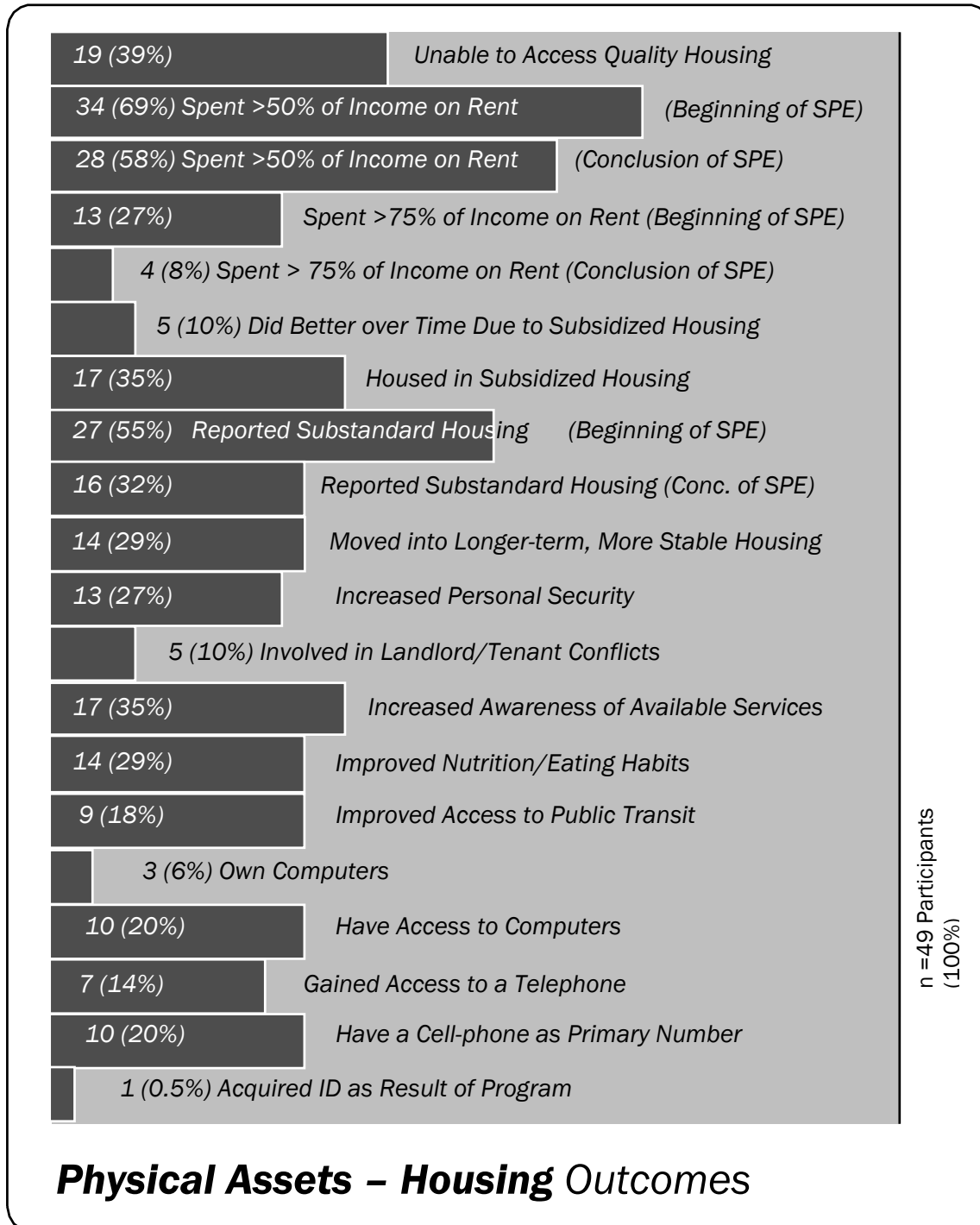


Personal Assets: *Personal identity* including self-esteem; self-confidence; motivation; and other emotional resources.



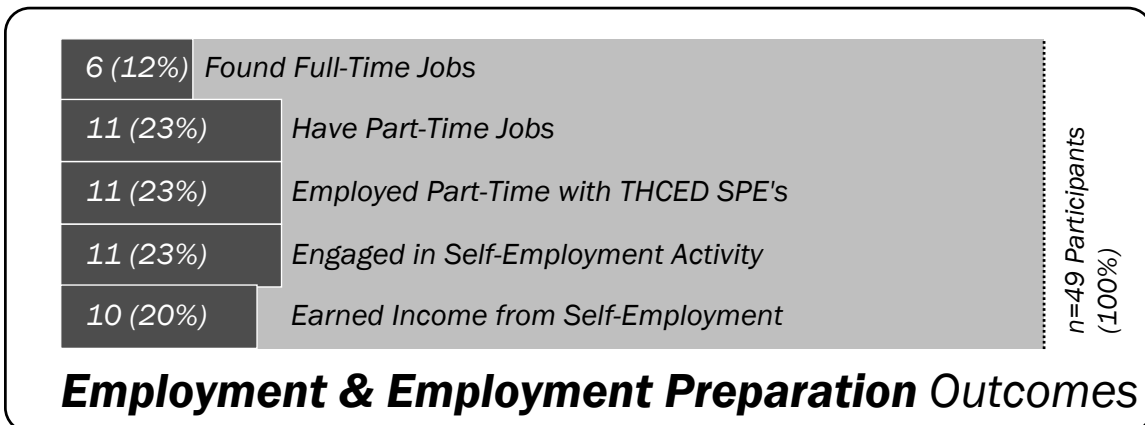
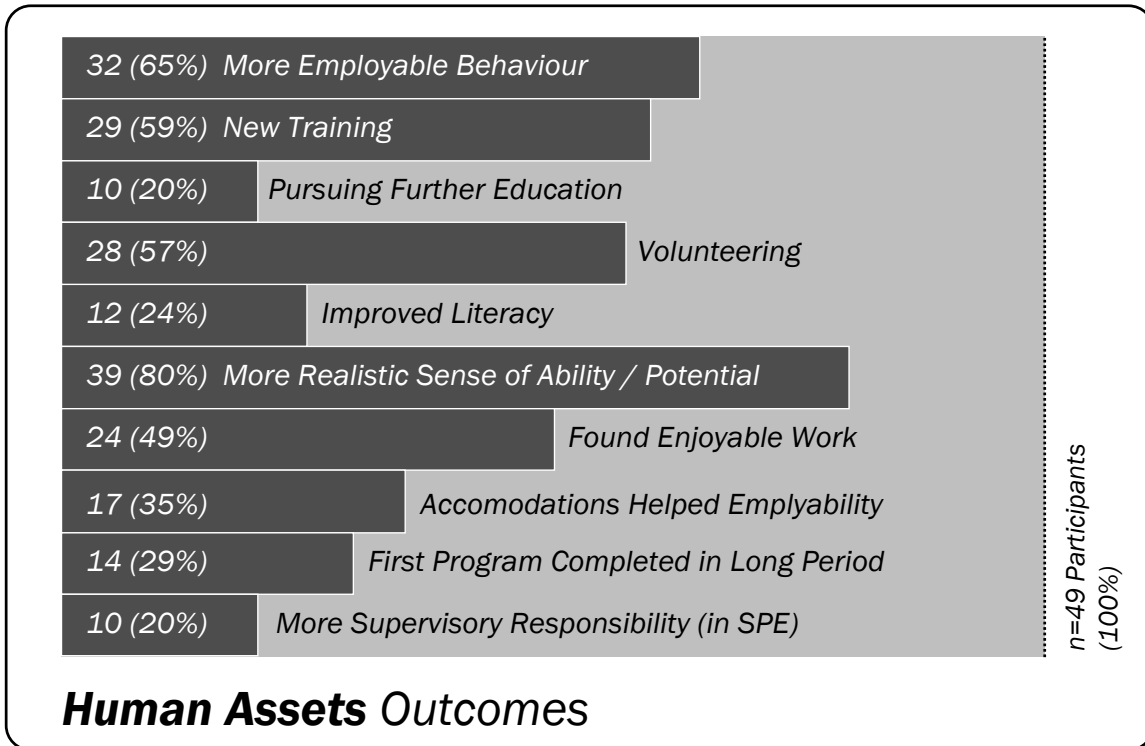
Participant Outcomes Appendix: Charts of Asset Gains

Physical Assets: Access to basic needs, services and entitlements including food security; stable, affordable housing; personal security; and access to social services and information.



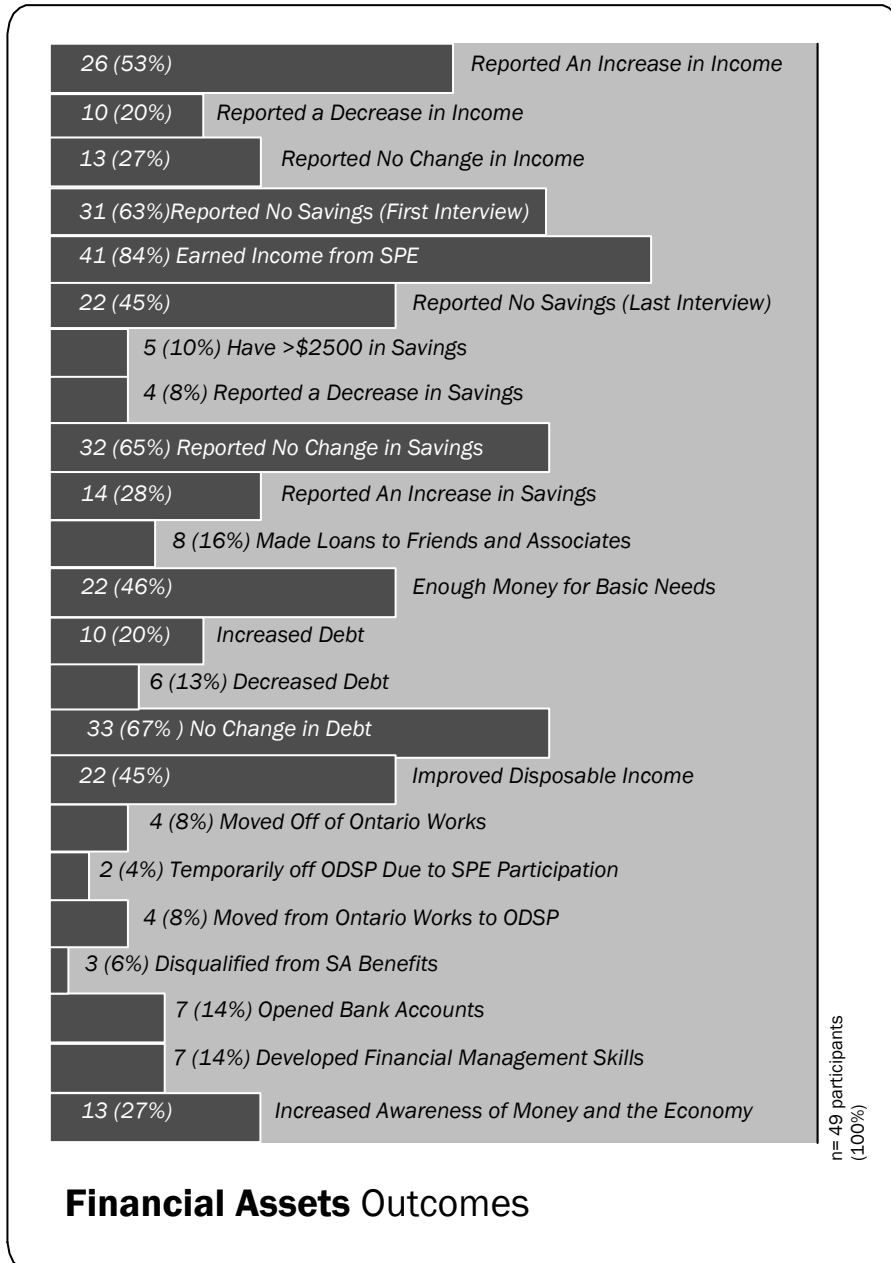
Participant Outcomes Appendix: Charts of Asset Gains

Human Assets: The ability to work and to engage in the economy including employability; leadership; health; skills; and knowledge.



Participant Outcomes Appendix: Charts of Asset Gains

Financial Assets: Economic security including: economic literacy; earning power; disposable income; and savings.



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