



# BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

THROUGH EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING



## YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES COMPENDIUM

An Asset-based Approach to Promoting a Skilled and Inclusive Workforce across Canada



**YWCA**  
TORONTO

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN



**United Way**  
Greater Toronto

# Canada

Funded by the Government of Canada's Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of YWCA Toronto and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

For more information about this project, visit our website at [www.ywca-toronto.org/building-futures](http://www.ywca-toronto.org/building-futures) or email [building-futures@ywca-toronto.org](mailto:building-futures@ywca-toronto.org).

If you have any further questions, please contact: Tsering Tsomo, Director of Employment and Training at [ttsomo@ywca-toronto.org](mailto:ttsomo@ywca-toronto.org) or Eva Pakyam, Employment Manager at [epakyam@ywca-toronto.org](mailto:epakyam@ywca-toronto.org).

## French Language Documents

The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project has included one Association that offers services in both official languages: YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region. For interested readers, we are publishing a French translation of select content from the Compendium and Toolkit.

Some names of YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project participants have been changed to respect their privacy.

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YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, Nunavut  
YWCA Halifax, Nova Scotia  
YWCA Hamilton, Ontario  
YWCA Metro Vancouver, British Columbia  
YWCA Moncton, New Brunswick  
YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, Ontario  
YWCA Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
YWCA Thompson, Manitoba

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the project, including: participants, alumnae, employers and community partners too numerous to name. We would also like to thank everyone at YWCA Toronto and the many individuals who supported the facilitation of this project.

We continue to be inspired in our work by the hundreds of participants and graduates who are changing their own lives and moving toward building sustainable futures for themselves and their families.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction—About the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Compendium .....	11
<b>Section 1: YWCA Toronto Employment and Training Programs</b>	
Overview.....	18
1.1 YWCA Toronto’s Skills Development Centre.....	19
1.2 The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model.....	21
1.2.1 The Five Components of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model.....	22
1.2.2 Women’s Pathways through the Model.....	25
1.2.3 Integrating an Asset-Based Approach.....	27
1.2.4 Integrating Essential Skills for Employment.....	35
1.2.5 Building Capacity through the Model .....	35
1.2.6 Integrating Employer Engagement.....	36
1.2.7 Building Intentional Community Partnerships .....	40
1.2.8 Challenges of the Model .....	42
<b>Section 2—The National YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Project</b>	
Overview.....	44
2.1 Engaging our Project Collaborators .....	45
2.1.1 Project Requirements 2014-2018 .....	46
2.1.2 Adapting Components of the Model .....	46
2.1.3 Value-added Features of the Project.....	47
2.2 Project Roll-out and Activities.....	47
2.2.1 Start-up: 2014-2015.....	47
2.2.2 The Pilot Programs and Evaluation Process: 2015-2016.....	47
2.2.3 Ongoing Development of Collaborator Program Models, Capacity Building Strategies and Knowledge Exchange: 2017-2018 .....	49
<b>Section 3—Regional Adaptations of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model</b>	
Overview.....	52
3.1 The Regional Programs.....	53
3.1.1 YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, Nunavut—Sewing to Success .....	54
3.1.2 YWCA Halifax, Nova Scotia—two programs: LAUNCH and Step Ahead .....	57
3.1.3 YWCA Hamilton, Ontario—two programs: Pre-Apprenticeship General Machinist and Industrial Mechanic (Millwright) Training for Women; Women’s Entrepreneurship Program .....	60
3.1.4 YWCA Metro Vancouver, British Columbia—Focus@Work.....	62
3.1.5 YWCA Moncton, New Brunswick—Women on the Move .....	65
3.1.6 YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, Ontario— Power of Trades/Puissance des Métiers.....	68
3.1.7 YWCA Saskatoon, Saskatchewan—Essential Skills for Employment.....	70
3.1.8 YWCA Thompson, Manitoba—Steps to Success.....	73
3.1.9 YWCA Toronto, Ontario—Administration Clerk Certificate, Education and Training Institute.....	75

## Section 4—Project Findings

Overview.....	80
4.1 Key Findings of the Pilot Program Research: 2015-2016.....	82
4.1.1 Individual Participant Level.....	82
4.1.2 Program/Organizational Capacity Building Level.....	93
4.2 Ongoing Development of Collaborator Programs, Capacity Building Strategies and Knowledge Exchange: 2017-2018.....	99
4.2.1 Collaborator Program Models.....	100
4.2.2 Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange.....	102

## Section 5—Reflections on Learning from the Project

Overview.....	106
5.1 Learning from a Community Economic Development Approach.....	106
5.2 Learning about an Asset-based Approach.....	106
5.3. Learning about Demographic Populations.....	107
5.4 Promoting New Ways to Build Capacity.....	109
5.5 Capacity Building through Knowledge Exchange.....	110

## Section 6—Moving Forward

Overview.....	112
6.1 Continue to Build an Evidence-based Case for Greater Investment in Holistic Foundational Skills Building Programs.....	112
6.2 Promote an Asset-based Approach.....	113
6.3 Keep a Focus on Equity and Gender.....	113
6.4 Create and Nurture Partnerships with Employers.....	113
6.5 Take an Intentional Community Engagement Approach to Collective Challenges.....	114
6.6 Advocate for Skills Building as a Community Asset.....	114
Conclusion.....	115
Appendices.....	117
Appendix 1—Overview of Key Socio-economic Challenges Facing Underserved Populations Across Canada.....	117
Appendix 2—YWCA Toronto Employment and Training Programs.....	120
Appendix 3—Integrating Essential Skills for Employment.....	123
Appendix 4—Key Evaluation Tools: Individual Participant Level.....	128
Bibliography.....	136

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ABOUT THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES COMPENDIUM

This YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Compendium shares learning from a five-year national participatory research initiative, the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) project, funded by the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESPP), Government of Canada. Nine collaborator YWCA Associations (including YWCA Toronto) from regions across Canada set out to explore how YWCA Toronto's approach to essential skills training could be refined as a program model and adapted with their diverse underserved populations, in order to contribute toward building a more skilled and inclusive workforce. The initiative grew out of YWCA Toronto Skills Development Centre's (SDC) experience of developing and delivering a holistic, asset-based approach to essential skills training geared to low-income women in Toronto.

Accompanying the Compendium is a YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Toolkit, which contains a sampling of the lesson plans, practitioner tips, and resources developed and tested by collaborators through the project.

The overall goal of the project was to increase the essential skills of underserved individuals so that they can prepare for, and engage and advance in today's workforce, and move toward greater socio-economic security. Led and facilitated by YWCA Toronto, it was launched in 2014 and will wrap up in March 2019. The program model that was refined through the national research is being branded by YWCA Toronto as the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model.

### WHAT IS THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES MODEL?

The YWCA BSF model goes beyond helping someone to obtain a job. Rather than starting with “deficits”—or what people perceive that they lack in terms of employment-related and other life skills—it takes a holistic approach to identifying and building their “assets.” The aim is to support them to build a foundation not just for participation and advancement in the labour market but also for moving forward with their livelihood goals. Assets are defined as “the building blocks for a future.”

The model draws on an adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods approach developed through YWCA Toronto's participation in a 2004-2009 Canadian Women's Foundation project (Canadian Women's Foundation and Eko Nomos Program Development Consultants—Beyond Survival report). It uses positive, asset-based tools and mapping processes to support individuals to explore their existing strengths, gain confidence and resilience, and identify which assets they need to build on in order to advance along their own unique pathways to success. The five areas of individual assets explored with participants<sup>1</sup> are: Basic Needs, Identity, Skills and Employability, Support and Connections, and Money.

The YWCA BSF model's flexible continuum of five components offers a full range of options for socio-economic advancement: from one-day needs assessments to foundational skills training, job skills and business training, all the way to leadership training and links to professional networks. The nine essential skills are integrated into all of its components in order to provide continuous enhancement of these skills. The model also provides an integrated menu of employment opportunities through YWCA Toronto's LinksToJobs Employers Network.

<sup>1</sup> Client/Participant: Any individual who participates/has participated in one or more programs/services of YWCA Toronto or of the other eight collaborators in the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project.

The model further takes an asset-based approach to capacity building at the organizational level to promote the stability and continuous improvement of programs. At a broader level, it strives to involve non-profit, public and private sectors and their communities in collective strategies and action to build capacity in the field, in order to promote stronger futures for all. This is why we designed the national project to include Associations from across Canada that work with a diverse range of underserved communities.

The YWCA BSF model is constantly evolving through testing and refinement as the socio-economic landscape changes and as we learn more about the outcomes of our work. Our research is ongoing, and this project represents a first step to take it to a national level. Evidence from the project research suggests that the model can be adapted to respond to the essential skills training needs, preferences and goals of any groups.

## FOCUS OF THE PROJECT

The project focused on four demographic groups—Indigenous, immigrant, mature, and youth—who may face particular challenges to participating in the labour market and building stronger futures. The majority (80%) of the approximately 550 individual participants who took part in the research self-identified as women.

Another key part of the research was to learn how organizations might find new ways of building their own capacity to sustain and demonstrate the value of their essential skills programs.

The research was therefore designed to explore two levels of outcomes of a holistic, asset-based approach and model to essential skills programming: that of the individual participant, and that of program/organizational capacity building. Through the project, YWCA Toronto's asset-based tools used with participants were further refined. Asset-based tools were also developed and implemented to explore five areas of program/organizational strength and potential for improvement: Client-focused, Connected, Efficient, Resilient, and Agile.

## COLLABORATOR ASSOCIATIONS IN THE PROJECT

1. YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, Nunavut
2. YWCA Halifax, Nova Scotia
3. YWCA Hamilton, Ontario
4. YWCA Metro Vancouver, British Columbia
5. YWCA Moncton, New Brunswick
6. YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, Ontario—English/French
7. YWCA Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
8. YWCA Thompson, Manitoba
9. YWCA Toronto, Ontario

## ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINES OF THE PROJECT RESEARCH

After project start-up in 2014 and selection of the collaborators, YWCA Toronto designed the project to gather and share learning.

### The Pilot Project Phase: 2015-2016

YWCA Toronto began by identifying key effective features of its holistic, asset-based approach as a program model—what to test through the research. The collaborative shared knowledge about challenges, expertise, and existing/emerging promising practices. YWCA Toronto facilitated training in its integrated approach to essential skills training delivery and in its asset-based approach and tools. These tools were drawn upon for the design and implementation of the national developmental evaluation to document outcomes. Collaborators then delivered their own regionally adapted pilot program models for their respective demographic groups (four to ten weeks with follow-up tracking of employment outcomes for up to six months for 20-50 participants). Formal evaluation reports were completed at the end of 2016.

### The Post-pilot Phase: 2017-2018

During this phase, collaborators pursued continued refinement, documentation and sharing of their regional adaptations. They further developed their employer and community partnerships to support the project purposes; and they shared and disseminated knowledge nationally through national/regional/community networks, events and media. They also



contributed their learning to this Compendium and the accompanying Toolkit. Since YWCA Toronto did not have the capacity to conduct a formal evaluation of post-pilot outcomes, the quantitative and qualitative data for this phase is drawn from collaborator reports.

## COLLABORATORS' REGIONAL ADAPTATIONS OF THE MODEL

The nine collaborator Associations serve a range of communities across Canada, including urban, rural and remote. Collaborators drew on their experience and on the YWCA BSF model to design flexibly adapted essential skills programs and curricula to pilot for the project while tailoring specific elements of their lesson plans, materials and delivery approaches to their program populations.

Six Associations designed, delivered and documented women-specific programs. The programs of YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, YWCA Saskatoon

and YWCA Thompson were gender inclusive. YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region was the one collaborator program in *both* official languages.

Some programs—such as in Agvvik Nunavut, Hamilton, National Capital Region, Saskatoon and Toronto—were industry specific. Both Agvvik Nunavut and Hamilton offered programs focused on small business development. Others—Halifax, Metro Vancouver, Moncton and Thompson—focused more generally on supporting participants to develop the soft and foundational essential skills, networks and resilience required to participate in the socio-economy.

In the end, nine different adapted program models and curricula have emerged from the project. Since the end of the research in 2018, some of these programs are continuing, while others may have changed or may no longer be offered. The box below captures them as they were offered during the research period.



The initial two-day ESE Collaborator forum in Toronto, ON.



## COLLABORATOR PROGRAMS:

**YWCA Agvvik Nunavut-Sewing to Success (Qisilirniq–“Working on Sealskin”)** is a program designed to offer culturally relevant healing while teaching traditional sewing skills, with the aim of supporting women to become more socio-economically independent and improve their sense of Inuit identity and self-confidence.

**Demographic Population:** Inuit women.

**YWCA Halifax–LAUNCH** and **Step Ahead** are two programs using the same model that incorporate skill building and employment readiness training for unemployed young women and women of all ages.

**Demographic Population:** Low-income women and young women.

**YWCA Hamilton–Pre-Apprenticeship for Women & Women’s Entrepreneurship** are two distinct programs. The Pre-Apprenticeship program (28 weeks) leads to a Level 1 trade certification from Mohawk College, followed by eight weeks of job placement. The Women’s Entrepreneurship program centres on small business development and offers women a business coach, training to design and implement a business plan, support to access grants and other lending resources, and mentoring. **Demographic Population:** Immigrant women and young women.

**YWCA of Metro Vancouver–Focus@Work** is a recognized employment program that equips women with the skills to promote themselves to employers, learn about suitable work environments and careers, and gain confidence in building their personal and professional networks. **Demographic Population:** Mature and immigrant women.

**YWCA Moncton–Women on the Move** is a self-development program that aims to support women to gain skills that will better prepare them for the work environment, as well as specific work-related skills needed for entry-level positions or to advance from entry-level work. **Demographic Population:** Mature women and young women.

**YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region–Power of Trades/Puissance des Métiers** is a sector-specific program offered in both official languages that aims to equip Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs), including immigrants residing in the Ottawa area, with the necessary skills to secure employment in skilled trades. **Demographic Population:** New immigrants.

**YWCA Saskatoon–Essential Skills for Employment in Hospitality** is a sector-specific program designed to prepare participants to succeed in gaining, maintaining and advancing in employment within the hospitality services industry. **Demographic Population:** Indigenous, immigrant, mature, and young women.

**YWCA Thompson–Steps to Success** is a pre-employment program that focuses on developing workplace essential skills and attitudes, to prepare people for the workplace. **Demographic Population:** Predominantly Indigenous men and women; also mature and youth.

**YWCA Toronto Administrative Clerk Certificate Program, Education and Training Institute (ETI)** is a program designed to prepare and certify women for a career in the administrative and business sectors. It focuses on developing the skills needed for working in a business environment. **Demographic Population:** predominantly low-income women, mature women, new immigrants and young women.

## PROJECT FINDINGS

### A Snapshot of YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Project Overall Outcomes: 2015-2018

#### 1. Individual Participant Level

- A cumulative total of over 550 individual participants were involved nationally in this pilot project from 2015 to 2018:
  - 154 participants completed the pilot program research process documented during the project evaluation between March 2015 and summer 2016, and collaborated in the evaluation team's November 2016 reports (a higher number of participants completed some/all of their training but not the entire evaluation process).
  - An additional 83 program participants were included in the follow-up data collection process that lasted into 2017, bringing the total number to 237.
  - An additional 313 participants were involved in programs delivered by collaborator Associations during the post-pilot phase that lasted until end of December 2018.

#### 2. Program/Organizational Level

- Nine Associations, including YWCA Toronto, delivered pilot programs that drew on the YWCA BSF model and customized its components to their demographic populations and to their regional contexts. Eight programs were offered in English, and one in both official languages.
- More organizations were also interested in learning from and adapting the model to their program populations, but it was beyond the capacity of YWCA Toronto to include them in the project. We have offered regional learning sessions through a Learning Community, and hope this Compendium and the accompanying Toolkit will foster further learning.

#### 3. Community Level

- To date, the project learning collaborative has reached out across Canada to over 50 employment and training organizations, literacy and essential skills organizations, Indigenous communities, settlement organizations, youth, specialized services organizations such as those serving women, and to the communities involved in the research.

## AN OVERVIEW OF PILOT PROGRAM OUTCOMES

### Individual Participant Level

While the size of the overall pilot program population was not large enough to draw empirical conclusions, clear and detailed evidence emerged about the impact of collaborators' adaptations of YWCA Toronto's holistic, asset-based model with their participants. In a relatively short timeframe, the programs promoted important changes in participants' lives. Even small changes related to training and employment represented significant results, given the high level of instability of many of the participants' lives and their low employment rates at entry to the pilot programs.

After the pilot phase, as reported by the 154 participants who completed the spring/summer 2016 Participant Outcomes Survey: 16% were working in a full-time job, over 20% were working in a part-time job, and over half were currently earning money through work they were doing (including self-employment and casual work).

Additional outcomes included: over 40% had acquired new certifications through short training programs (such as food safety, First Aid, and WHMIS) offered by the pilot programs, 23% had gone on to further formal training or education, and 19% had improved their English language skills (two individuals reported having improved their French language skills).

Over 45% of respondents reported being engaged in a job search; a third reported having developed realistic job plans as a result of their pilot program; 8% had found volunteer positions, to help build their employability; and 5% reported having been placed in a temporary job placement or internship. Across all pilot programs, the specific skill areas in which participants reported growing the most were: "job search skills," "speaking up and sharing my ideas," "customer service skills," and "planning and organizing job tasks."

The process of exploring and mapping assets added a new, holistic dimension to the picture. It gave participants language and a visual framework for assessing their strengths and capabilities in a broad and more balanced range of asset areas, and on an ongoing basis, in order to sustain long-term progress. The programs have shown a clear impact in building participants' confidence and sense of self, confirming the importance of individual asset-based reflection and customized, culturally appropriate activities targeted to specific populations. This was particularly true in Indigenous programming.

Program staff also worked proactively to reduce participants' social isolation and boost their resilience and self-esteem. Staff designed and delivered peer-based learning that builds empathy and strong relationships of support among participants. These relationships were reported as lasting well beyond the group training.

### Program/Organizational Level

All of the collaborators noted that the capacity building focus of the national project and the new language of program/organizational asset areas have helped them to take a more intentional approach as to how they design, document, reflect on and work to improve their program models and delivery, and to find new ways of building capacity and sustainability. They all reported strength, at the outset of the research, in their "Client-focused" asset area, and yet they still managed to enhance their assets in this area over the course of pilot program delivery. They perceived the "Connected" area as the one most strengthened, however, reflecting their efforts to promote community and business engagement. All pursued strategies to enhance community engagement in training by inviting guest speakers, Elders and mentors from the community to participate in their programming.

Adapting the YWCA BSF model’s asset-based approach and tools appear to have improved the “Effective” area of programs at various levels, including curriculum, coaching, evaluation and even fundraising. Collaborators have made changes in the way that they manage programs and coordinate staffing, in order to deploy more efficiently the additional human resources required to offer a client-centred approach to programming. In the “Resilient” area, raising community awareness of the parent Association and the program and its goals has proven to be an important sustainability strategy. Collaborators worked to build a strong identity and higher visibility, which contributed to the credibility of their initiative, the development of partnerships and the effectiveness of fundraising efforts.

The “Agile” focus on learning and innovation has been a success. Collaborators have embedded new ideas and practices into their program models and their wider organizations. They have strengthened and enhanced new capacities and practices aimed at improving skills alignment and employment training outcomes. Moreover, each collaborator has done this in a unique way by building on pre-existing strengths and by adapting these new approaches to specific local challenges and opportunities.



## AN OVERVIEW OF POST-PILOT OUTCOMES

### Individual Participant Level

Between 2016 and 2017, follow-up and new participant outcomes data was collected with a total of 237 individuals after the formal pilot evaluation. Of this overall population, 62% were in employment (full time, part time, and/or self-employed), 16% were in education and/or training (such as job placement internships, further training and higher education), and 22% were engaged in other activities (such as actively seeking employment, in placements and moving on to jobs, volunteering, or taking a break to deal with personal issues).

YWCA Toronto refined the overall data in order to separate the outcomes of programs working with participants mainly at a pre-employment stage from those of programs working mainly at the employment stage. Of the pre-employment programs (YWCAs Agvik, Halifax, Moncton and Thompson), 53% of participants were in employment, 30% were in education and/or training, and 18% were engaged in other activities (as identified above). Of the employment programs (YWCAs Hamilton, Metro Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto, and YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region), 71% were in employment, 24% were in education and/or training, and 5% were engaged in other activities.

### Program/Organizational Level

Since the 2015-2016 pilot phase, all collaborators have remained committed to participating in our national knowledge exchange. They have continued to draw on collective learning about the YWCA BSF model in order to adapt and enhance their programs and practices, and many have been able to carry on offering their adapted models beyond the pilot phase. Collaborators have reported how the project has continued to inspire them to cultivate new employer and community connections. Even though some staff are in precarious employment situations themselves, they remain dedicated to keeping their programs afloat and being “anchors” in their organizations and communities.

All collaborators have participated in the dissemination process, at national and regional levels as well as within their Associations and communities. Learning was shared with over 50 other organizations interested in integrating a holistic, asset-based approach into their work. This number includes entities such as the Province of Nova Scotia, the Adult Literacy Provincial Forums in Manitoba and Saskatoon, and the Greater Toronto Employment and Training Programs Networks. Partnerships are emerging from coast to coast, such as the Saint John's Centre for Community Partners and the British Columbia Research Centre for Development.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT

This five-year national project has been a great learning experience for YWCA Toronto. We did not expect that so many individuals, organizations, employers and other community partners would be interested in investing with us to research the potential of the YWCA BSF model to build a more skilled and inclusive workforce.

The challenges our collaborative faced along the way in designing and delivering their adapted program models, curricula and lesson plans were a major part of the learning process, and in many respects as important to document as the project's positive outcomes. These challenges appear to reflect two key themes: the extent and complexity of the need for essential skills training for underserved populations in today's socio-economy, and the uncertain funding context that can threaten the capacity of even the larger non-profit organizations to sustain and innovate, and to keep pace with new labour market and demographic trends across Canada. We explore some highlights from our learning.

### 1. Learning from a Community Economic Development Approach

We designed the research project as a respectful, participatory knowledge-exchange process involving a broad range of stakeholders in our learning community—from individual program participants and alumnae at the nine pan-Canadian sites to collaborator staff, all the way to our many employer and community partners and the Government of Canada. This process was complex, time-consuming and demanding for all collaborators. They nonetheless shared with us how the knowledge exchange from a national community of learning has further built their capacity.

1. to keep their participants at the forefront and involve them in all areas of programming, in order for everyone to have a voice in social change;
2. to collect a broader range of evidence-based quantitative and qualitative data that shows the impact of their programs; and
3. to advocate across organizations and communities for partnerships that will invest in building more sustainable programs, in order to promote a skilled and inclusive workforce.

### 2. Learning About an Asset-based Approach

Many of the participants who took part in the project live in highly precarious socio-economic circumstances and may struggle simply to engage in and sustain their participation in foundational skills-building programs, let alone participate in mainstream employment. However, people from all demographic groups reported positively on the value of starting with their strengths rather than their perceived deficits, and of learning how to examine and reflect on these strengths and feel encouraged to explore new possibilities. The YWCA BSF model's emphasis on foundational skills training appears to build hope, self-confidence, self-direction and resilience at individual, program/organizational and community levels. Integrating such foundational training with individualized pathways to success has been a highly effective practice.



### 3. Learning About Demographic Populations

Collaborators have shown, through regionally adapted programs and promising practices tailored to the needs and goals of their respective populations, that the asset-based model can be adapted flexibly to a broad diversity of needs, skills levels and employment/life goals, as well as to a wide range of local contexts. While a strong case emerged from the project research for gender-focused and culturally appropriate programming, we also learned that specific demographic populations are not necessarily homogeneous in their needs and interests, and, in turn, that many underserved individuals experience challenges to participation in the labour market that cut across demographic groups.

### 4. Promoting New Ways to Build Capacity

Asset-based thinking and related strategies appear to provide cost-effective solutions for large and small organizations. More specialized sectoral employment approaches also appear effective in supporting programs seeking to build strategic working relationships with employers and other key stakeholders. Such substantive, reciprocal networks of learning and support among non-profit, private and public sectors will be crucial in order to include all demographic groups in a knowledge-based socio-economy.

The many adapted essential skills program models, curricula, lesson plans and promising practices emerging from this pilot project have shown promise toward building a community of shared knowledge exchange, enhancing the capacity of our sector. Many collaborators experienced staff turnover that has resulted in gaps in program/organizational memory and expertise. Approaches such as the Learning Community may make it possible to create a “bank” of collective resources that practitioners and others interested can draw upon to devise their own adapted strategies for responding to complex socio-economic issues, building program capacity, and growing and sustaining proactive collaborative partnerships.



## MOVING FORWARD

This national project has helped to provide a clearer picture of the needs and interests of underserved populations across Canada as they seek to build economic security and more meaningful levels of engagement in their respective communities. It has also confirmed that the non-profit sector works in a precarious funding environment that can undermine the sustainability of even well-established essential skills programs.

A key theme repeated by this collaborative is how rapidly the world of work keeps changing. The new economy leaves many highly qualified people struggling as it increasingly generates “contingent” employment that cannot offer a living wage, quality work and opportunities for advancement. The automation of many industrial sectors will shrink further the pool of available jobs, even for technically skilled workers. In this context, a siloed<sup>2</sup> program approach to essential skills training will not be sufficiently agile to meet employers’ shifting demands.

<sup>2</sup> Silo: This term is used here to refer to an organizational model that tends to create separate delivery systems, rather than a coordinated, holistic model of service delivery.

In the future, a stronger focus on assets at the front end of employment program supports might prevent people from having to go through cycles of rejection and failure in our employment systems. Programs will also need to offer more integrated and sophisticated pathways for continuous upgrading and learning— from foundational skills and the soft skills necessary to succeed in today’s workforce, including professional and leadership opportunities.

The non-profit sector can also explore new ways of communicating to private and public sectors about the value of investing in foundational programs, even if outcomes take longer to achieve and to become internalized as first steps toward a stronger livelihood. Further knowledge exchange may help to stimulate and grow funding partnerships and models that can create a novel form of “industry,” so that non-profit organizations are not constantly set back by unstable revenue.

YWCA Toronto will continue working to engage more individuals, practitioners, employers, organizations and the broader community in finding collective solutions to socio-economic challenges. It is not just a matter of people and programs adapting to the changing economy. Employers must also see the importance of adapting along with their changing communities.

Sustained, coordinated investment to provide solid employment and learning opportunities may greatly reduce the number of people on the margins of our socio-economy. While the case can be made that this will result in higher productivity and lower costs to government services, there is a more powerful argument for inclusion: that our community will be the poorer until each person can contribute to it through her unique assets.



## INTRODUCTION—ABOUT THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES COMPENDIUM

The aim of this Compendium is to share learning about a community economic development<sup>3</sup> (CED) approach and program model that show potential to strengthen the ways in which essential skills training programs can support communities across Canada to build a more skilled and inclusive workforce.

The Compendium describes the process and presents the key findings of a five-year national participatory research project funded by the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESPP), Government of Canada. Led and facilitated by YWCA Toronto, the project was launched in 2014 and will wrap up in March 2019. The initiative grew out of YWCA Toronto's Skills Development Centre's (SDC) experience of designing and delivering a holistic asset-based approach to essential skills training geared to low-income women in Toronto. Based on our learning from this experience, we wanted to find out if the approach could be effective in supporting other underserved demographic groups to build the skills required or participating and prospering in today's economy.

Through the project, nine collaborator YWCA Associations (including YWCA Toronto) from diverse regions across Canada set out to explore how the approach could be refined as a program model, and adapted to improve the employment and livelihood outcomes of their underserved populations. The project focused on four demographic groups—Indigenous, immigrant, mature and youth—who may face particular challenges to participating in the labour market and building stronger futures. The majority (80%) of the approximately 550 individual participants who took part in the research self-identified as women. The project was initially designed with a specific focus on women, but broadened over the design process to become gender inclusive.

Among the products developed from the project are this YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Compendium and an accompanying YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Toolkit that contains a sampling of the collaborators' lesson plans, practitioner tips, and resources that were developed and tested in the project. Both products contain a description of the essential skills program model that has emerged from the project and is being branded by YWCA Toronto as the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model.

### The Compendium is designed for:

- practitioners in the field of essential skills training who are seeking to find and test new ways to build the capacity of their programs;
- private sector entities seeking to learn more about how to partner with the non-profit sector to build a skilled and inclusive workforce;
- other entities (philanthropic, government, community, etc.) seeking to support employment training initiatives, particularly for underserved populations; and
- anyone who wishes to know more about a Learning Community emerging from the project.

### The Toolkit is designed for:

- practitioners and any others interested to learn more about the YWCA BSF model and integrated asset-based approach; and/or
- practitioners and any others interested to learn more about the YWCA BSF model and integrated asset-based approach; and/or to explore collaborators' regional adaptations of the model, and draw on the lesson plans and tips for their own program populations.

3. Community economic development (CED): An alternative to conventional economic development. Its central tenet is that: "... problems facing communities—unemployment, poverty, job loss, environmental degradation and loss of community control—need to be addressed in a holistic and participatory way."  
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community\\_economic\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_economic_development)>



## WHAT INSPIRED THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES PROJECT?

As a member of a national federation of 32 YWCA Associations, YWCA Toronto is dedicated to building sustainable futures for individuals and communities, especially for the underserved women who come to us for support in transforming and moving forward with their lives. Since 1875, when we started the first typing class for women in Toronto, we have worked to design and deliver timely and innovative programs that respond to women's changing socio-economic needs and goals. Our documented outcomes and the stories of the women themselves show how our programs and services have helped women to advance, even from deep poverty and highly unstable situations, toward stronger futures and active leadership. We see each woman as a whole person to be respected for her unique strengths to create her own future. We work to provide women with hope and self-confidence, and with the skills and resilience to invest in their pathways to economic stability and livelihood success.

YWCA Toronto is a front-line witness to the demand in our communities for gender-focused essential skills training programs. We are acutely aware of the growing number of women, young women and mature workers who are being left behind in our highly competitive labour market. In response, we have been experimenting with new ways to sharpen our delivery models and deepen our employer and community networks in order to sustain our work and provide fulfilling employment and livelihood opportunities for more women.

Since 2004, we have been incubating and documenting an innovative, holistic, asset-based approach for employment training at our YWCA Skills Development Centre (SDC) that shows promise in supporting participants to engage in and sustain employment. This national project grew out of our one-year 2010 project—also funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)—to pilot our approach to Essential Skills for Employment (ESE) training formally with women in East Toronto. We were able to refine the approach and learn more about its effectiveness in responding to the complex socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized women.

We shared our learning from the pilot in our first *YWCA Toronto Compendium of Best Practices in Employment Programming* (2010) [www.ywcatoronto.org/buildingfutures](http://www.ywcatoronto.org/buildingfutures). This publication attracted interest from government and from other essential skills practitioners working with a range of communities across Canada. The practitioners were seeking to learn from our approach and share their own challenges and promising practices in program design and delivery in order to build much-needed capacity in the field.

## WHY A NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE?

In summer 2018, the Federal Government released Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, setting a reduction target of 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030. Poverty is defined as: "The condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society" (Employment and Social Development Canada).

The importance of understanding the many dimensions of poverty and of the need for a holistic, socio-economic approach to moving people toward sustainable futures is not new to practitioners in the field of poverty reduction such as YWCA Toronto. Our external research and in-house experience working with women show that far too many underserved individuals across Canada—including Indigenous, immigrant, mature, youth, and those facing an intersection of multiple challenges—are still being left out of the labour market and full participation in society, while this country is missing out on their knowledge, talent and expertise.

Most easily available jobs are increasingly precarious, short-term, low-paid and without benefits. The new economy demands strong skills from everyone seeking to prepare for, and engage and thrive in it. For those more distant from the labour market, challenges to participation can be daunting. Among the many that they face, gender inequity can have the hardest impact. See **Appendix 1** for more detail on the socio-economic challenges faced by underserved populations.

This is why we aimed to learn about how our approach to essential skills for employment training with underserved women could be adapted to build the foundational essential skills of other demographic groups distant from the labour market.

Another key part of the research in the national project was to explore how organizations could find new ways of building their own capacity to sustain and demonstrate the value of their essential skills programs. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and across Canada, YWCA Toronto has observed a common thread: even though the non-profit sector plays such an important role in fostering positive social change, it does not have as much voice in shaping policy as the private and public sectors. A number of recent reports highlight the precariousness of this sector, confirming the learning from our collaborators in the national project. Many non-profit entities are struggling in the face of siloed and/or project-based funding that can fluctuate with changes in government policy, in spite of the knowledge and experience that they could be contributing toward building a more just and equitable society. Organizations large and small are stretched to sustain their capacity to address the immense employment training and related social needs in our communities.

*The research was therefore designed to explore two levels of outcomes of a holistic asset-based approach to essential skills programming: that of the individual participant, and that of program/organizational capacity building.*

## GOAL AND PURPOSES OF THE PROJECT

The overall goal of the project was to increase the essential skills of underserved individuals so that they can prepare for, and engage and advance in today's workforce, and move toward greater socio-economic security.

### PURPOSE 1: Refining YWCA Toronto's Approach

- To refine YWCA Toronto's approach as an essential skills program model through learning from all collaborators in the national project, by documenting how the approach works to improve essential skills outcomes for other underserved demographic groups. Through the project, it will be branded as the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model.

#### At-a-Glance: What is the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) Model?

- This evolving model goes beyond helping someone to obtain a job. It offers a holistic continuum of training programs and services for career advancement and lifelong learning, as well as integrated employment opportunities provided through YWCA Toronto's LinksToJobs Employers Network
- It uses a positive, asset-based approach and tools to support individuals and programs/organizations to explore their existing strengths and maximize their outcomes.
- It integrates the nine essential skills into all of its components in order to provide continuous enhancement of these skills.
- It takes an intentional, asset-based approach to community economic development, involving individuals, non-profit organizations, public and private sectors, and the broader community in developing strategies and taking action to build capacity in the field.

See below **Section 1.2** for more detail on the model.

### PURPOSE 2: Regional Adaptations of the Model

- For collaborator Associations across the country already delivering essential skills programs to draw on the model to create their own regionally adapted program models for their diverse demographic groups, and to test and document the outcomes of these programs in order to explore the viability of an asset-based approach and model in a wide range of local contexts.



### PURPOSE 3: Building Program/Organizational Capacity

- To document and share key promising practices and lessons learned from this national initiative as a contribution to building the capacity of Literacy and Essential<sup>4</sup> (LES) training organizations nationally to promote a skilled and inclusive workforce.
- To create a community of knowledge exchange and learning to improve the prospects of economic security, equality and sustainable futures for all.

### COLLABORATOR ASSOCIATIONS IN THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES PROJECT

The project has involved nine collaborator Associations from coast to coast, including YWCA Toronto:

1. YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, Nunavut
2. YWCA Halifax, Nova Scotia
3. YWCA Hamilton, Ontario
4. YWCA Metro Vancouver, British Columbia
5. YWCA Moncton, New Brunswick
6. YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, Ontario–English/French
7. YWCA Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
8. YWCA Thompson, Manitoba
9. YWCA Toronto, Ontario



4. LES (literacy and essential skills) vs. ESE (essential skills for employment): The term “literacy and essential skills” (LES) refers to the broader field of literacy and essential skills training. The term “essential skills for employment” (ESE) refers to the skills needed to prepare for, and engage and advance in the labour market.

## OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

The national project has taken a participatory, developmental approach to capturing, documenting and exploring individual and capacity outcomes from the research (see box below).

### What is a Developmental Evaluation Approach?

*“Developmental evaluation is an approach to understanding the activities of a program operating in dynamic, novel environments with complex interactions. It focuses on innovation and strategic learning rather than standard outcomes, and is as much a way of thinking about programs-in-context and the feedback they produce” (Norman).*

*“Instead of using the evaluation framework primarily to judge whether a project has been successful (i.e. whether it followed the plan and achieved the predicted result), developmental evaluation instead primarily uses the framework to help the team learn about their program and tests assumptions about both the plan and the end destination” (Tjornbo).*

“Developmental evaluation supports the process of innovation within an organization and in its activities. Initiatives that are innovative are often in a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they frequently unfold in a changing and unpredictable environment.... Adaptations are largely driven by new learning and by changes in participants, partners and context” (Gamble).

A developmental approach particularly suited this project—an experimental community research initiative involving a broad range of collaborators and other stakeholders working in diverse regional contexts with underserved populations—because it reflects:

- the core approach of the YWCA BSF model, which is designed to evolve flexibly with the changing socio-economy and with corresponding changes in the demographic, employment and training needs of those distant from the labour market;
- the process of continuous experimenting, learning and refinement that was documented during the five years of the project;
- the learning needs, goals, cultures and contributions of the demographic groups participating in the research; and
- the expertise and contributions of all collaborators and their communities.



## At-a-Glance: Key Features of the Project Learning Process

The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project was designed to gather and share learning through:

- a process of identifying and defining key effective features of YWCA Toronto's holistic asset-based approach as a program model—what to test through the research;
- facilitation of knowledge exchange with regional collaborators about everyone's specific and common challenges, and sharing expertise and existing/emerging promising practices in their communities;
- supporting collaborators to design, deliver and document the outcomes of their own adapted program models for study in the project with their respective demographic groups (four to ten weeks with follow-up tracking of employment outcomes for up to six months for 20-50 participants);
- offering training in an integrated approach to delivering essential skills training to participants, and the asset-based approach and tools YWCA Toronto has adapted in-house;
- participation in the design of tools for, and the implementation of the national developmental evaluation;
- continued refinement, documentation and sharing of their regional adaptations;
- continued development of employer and community partnerships to support the project purposes; and
- sharing and dissemination nationally of knowledge through national/regional/community networks, events and media, as well as through the Compendium and Toolkit.

## HOW TO NAVIGATE THE COMPENDIUM

**Section 1—YWCA Toronto Employment and Training Programs** provides an overview of our Association's background in the field of essential skills programming; a description of YWCA Toronto's Skills Development Centre, where the asset-based approach was first implemented and documented; and a detailed description of the emerging YWCA BSF model and related asset-based tools that were refined and adapted through the project.

**Section 2—The National YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Project** describes in more detail how the project was designed and rolled out, including the activities involved for the nine regional collaborators during the five-year span of the project.

**Section 3—Regional Adaptations of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model** provides an overview of the collaborator Associations and a profile of the regional programs that they designed and delivered, including the innovative elements that they introduced for their diverse program populations.

**Section 4—Project Findings** examines the documented outcomes of the research at two levels: individual participant and program/organizational capacity building. It also explores the project's potential contribution to building a community of knowledge exchange.

**Section 5—Reflections on Learning from the Project** explores what was learned from this community economic development initiative, and highlights some of the key promising practices identified through the research.

**Section 6—Moving Forward** and the **Conclusion** contain core recommendations that have emerged from the project about how to promote stronger socio-economic futures for underserved populations across Canada, and build capacity in the field of essential skills training to sustain and advocate for this important work.

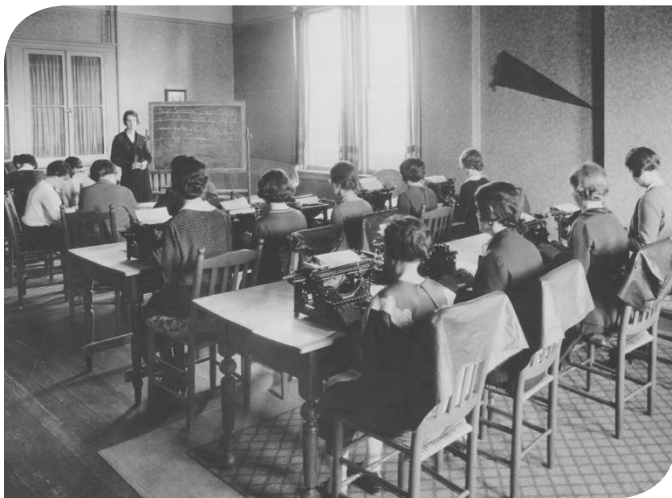
# SECTION 1: YWCA Toronto Employment and Training Programs





## OVERVIEW

Founded in 1873, YWCA Toronto is a member of YWCA Canada and the world YWCA. Our mission is to serve women and girls. We have a long history and a deep understanding of the issues that have affected the well-being of marginalized and disadvantaged women, girls and women-led families. The Association focuses on supporting women to build strong futures with well-paying jobs, safe housing, high-quality daycare, leadership development and lives free from violence. In 2018, we assisted 7,611 women in their efforts to gain stronger economic futures through our employment and training programs.

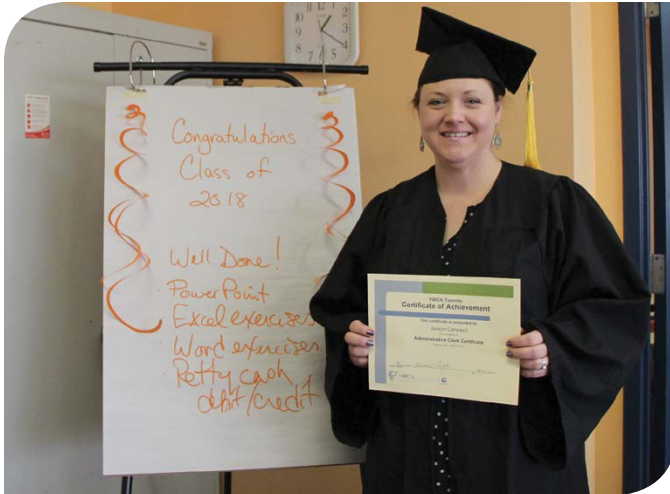


Since 1884, YWCA Toronto has been responding to the changing needs of women in our community by designing and specializing in no-cost and affordable quality training and professional development programs. By the early '60s, we had already launched programs providing: vocational assessment, career planning, life-skills, employability skills training, and academic upgrading. From the '70s to the '90s, we added to our menu of women-focused programs and services, with a pre-bridging program, a General Education Diploma (GED) program, and a program to support women to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment.

In 2000, we opened our holistic, one-stop Employment Resource Centre in Scarborough to offer practical job-search workshops, computer and IT facilities, individual coaching, employer contacts and other resources. In 2004, we began to incubate YWCA Toronto's Skills Development Centre (SDC) as an enterprise designed to serve both a social and financial purpose, integrating essential skills training into a comprehensive menu of training, recruitment and consulting services to benefit individuals, employers and the broader community. In 2006, we began a career-planning program with a focus on sole-support mothers, and another comprehensive training program that gives priority to women who have experienced or are at risk of domestic violence. In 2008, we designed a program to help newcomer women overcome barriers to employment in Canada. We continue to innovate and fine tune our employment programming, products and services to meet new community needs through programs such as our pre-apprenticeship skilled trades programs and our iOS & Android Mobile Application Developer program for women.

We now have three employment and training sites across Toronto that work collaboratively to offer multiple programs to equip women—including Indigenous, immigrant and racialized women who have experienced poverty, low income, violence, unemployment and underemployment—with the training to advance their futures. Through our programs, we facilitate access to the labour market for women, providing one-to-one job search advice, career direction, skills training, employment support and English literacy training. We also support women to pave pathways from entry-level positions to careers with good salaries, benefits and opportunities for advancement. Our success rate is promising, and our program design and service-delivery approaches are goal centred. We use individual feedback, focus groups and community evaluations to assess outcomes and refine programs.





*“The YWCA has a lot to offer. To help and support each and every one of us no matter of our skills, background, etc. They are always willing to help.”*

**YWCA TORONTO** participant

*Though we offer some training and workshops for a fee, the majority of our programs are free. See [Appendix 2](#) for full detail on YWCA Toronto Employment and Training programs, programs and services offered at 3090 Kingston Road, and programs currently offered at the Skills Development Centre.*

## 1.1 YWCA TORONTO'S SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

We began the YWCA SDC in 2004 as a response to a recognized need for employment training services in our community, particularly among low-income women facing a range of challenges in their lives. Many of the challenges documented then through our in-house research persist today, such as:

- low literacy and language skills;
- low or weak technical skills and/or understanding of today's workplace and/or workplace experience;
- professional/academic credentials and certifications not recognized in Canada;
- weak networks/references/information regarding the labour market;
- low income security and/or dependence on precarious/low-paying jobs;
- job loss transition; and
- personal issues (that might include one or a combination of: lone parenting/eldercare with insufficient support, diagnosed and/or undiagnosed health issues, violence in the home, social isolation, legal issues, low self-esteem and fear of change).

In 2002-2004, the non-profit sector experienced major cutbacks in government funding for employment training programs. YWCA Toronto lost its funding for the community-based training and internships previously integrated into our model. We continued to advocate for community-based, women-centred training while working with our existing programs. At the same time, we began to test newer approaches to sustainable programming through a community economic development (CED) approach to employment training that included social enterprise development.

After conducting research into other CED initiatives, learning circles, and co-operative models in Canada and internationally, we started to develop a holistic, gender-focused program approach that would serve both our social and financial sustainability purposes, involving input from the women we work with as well as our staff, and employers and other partners across our community. Our goal was to establish an enterprise run by women, for women, that could build sustainability through a combination of free and means-based fee-for-service products and services. We also wanted to be bolder in researching and testing new approaches to workforce and socio-economic development challenges.

With a 2004 seed grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF), we incubated the SDC as an evolving program and positioned it as a social enterprise. From 2004-2009, through participating

in the CWF's Economic Development Collaborative Fund, we were also able to learn the strength-based Sustainable Livelihoods approach and asset mapping methodology, and integrate them into the SDC and its program evaluation tools (see below, **Section 1.2.3 Integrating an Asset-based Approach**). From 2004-2012, we were able to strengthen our program and build its capacity through coordinating it with our other employment and training programs co-located at our 3090 Kingston Road location, where a range of transformative services and programs are offered (for more detail, see **Appendix 2** or visit [www.ywca-toronto.org/employment](http://www.ywca-toronto.org/employment)).

Based on the interest in our 2010 Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)-funded pilot and first Compendium ([www.ywca-toronto.org/building-futures](http://www.ywca-toronto.org/building-futures)), we applied to OLES for a second phase of funding to expand our reach and explore the potential to adapt our approach to other communities across Canada. OLES was particularly interested in the approaches we were developing to build organizational capacity to sustain our essential skills programs, and to offer opportunities for participants through fostering

employer and community partnerships. So we included a specific focus on program/organizational capacity building in the national project research.

Our YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model is constantly evolving through a process of developmental research in order to respond to the changing needs of our community. YWCA SDC staff also keep up to date on research into other employment training and livelihood development approaches elsewhere in Canada and internationally, through entities with a similar focus on social equity, diversity and inclusion, such as the Centre for Social Innovation, Diversity Institute, REDF, Aspen, Acumen etc. (for links, see **Bibliography**). We are working to expand our networks with participants, alumnae, employers, community partners and our national partners through the project. Today, our YWCA Toronto Employment and Training hub, located in Scarborough, Ontario, is a thriving learning community where leadership development, partnerships, collaboration and social engagement are nurtured and promoted.

*“The experience I had at YWCA Toronto literally saved my life. Depression is said to be the killer of hope—and in my case, it truly was—but every teacher played a significant role in showing me that I’m capable, that I’m worth it and that I have what it takes to succeed. Having programs like these, in a safe and judgement-free space, set me back on the right path. I am so excited to take the next steps toward a career in Business Administration, get back on my feet and become financially independent again, none of which would have ever been possible without the amazing women at YWCA Toronto. Words cannot express how grateful I am.”*

**MELISSA, YWCA TORONTO** participant

## 1.2 THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES MODEL

Documented outcomes from our employment and training programs show that women can be supported to move from even dire poverty toward building their futures. Yet the process takes time and depends on each woman's situation, which can change suddenly and unexpectedly in ways beyond her control. To negotiate new risks and to advance, in spite of unexpected events and complex intersecting systemic challenges, our participants also need to be inspired with hope and a passion for lifelong learning. In today's rapidly changing socio-economy, a solid foundation of assets—the “building blocks for a future”—including essential skills, self-direction and resilience are vital to moving forward.

YWCA Toronto's approach has always been to respect each woman who walks through our doors as a whole individual with unique strengths and experience. Rather than beginning with a woman's perceived deficits—or what she lacks—coming into a program, the YWCA BSF model starts by exploring with her the complete picture of her strengths. The model meets a woman where she is, at whatever stage she may be on her movement toward a livelihood. It supports her to build on her existing strengths and create her own individual pathway to success. It nurtures self-empowerment and personal growth, and integrates foundation-building skills training and lifelong learning opportunities throughout its programs and services. These are among the features shown to have the most impact for participants.

The model also takes a holistic approach to the actual process of building skills. In the past, Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) programs have tended to work in silos, where learners were first encouraged to upgrade their literacy skills and then seek participation in the economy, once they were more job ready. In contrast, the YWCA BSF model integrates the nine essential skills into all aspects of the model—from a woman's first meeting with us to explore her strengths, and to map her career and life goals and what she needs to achieve them.

YWCA Toronto's BSF model goes beyond helping someone to obtain a job. Drawing on YWCA Toronto's research and experience, the model is designed to strengthen program outcomes by:

1. Putting the **individual participant at the centre** of an integrated series of training programs and services that can support each person where they are, from foundational skills-building all the way to job placement, retention and career advancement, to mentoring and leadership. We also collaborate with our **LinksToJobs Employers Network** to provide a range of practical opportunities for program participants.
2. Integrating the **nine essential skills into all aspects of the program** to provide continuous enhancement of these skills.
3. Keeping a strong focus on **building the crucial foundational skills** (including “soft” skills of confidence and resilience) needed to overcome the multiple and often intersecting challenges faced by those distant from the labour market.
4. Using **an adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods asset-based approach and tools** to support individuals and organizations to explore their existing assets and maximize their outcomes in a holistic range of areas (see below, **Section 1.2.3**).
5. Taking **an intentional CED approach** to involving individuals, non-profit organizations, public and private sectors, and the broader community in strategies and actions to build capacity in the field.



The model is in a continuous process of testing and refinement as the socio-economic landscape changes and as we learn more about the outcomes of our work. Our research is ongoing, and this project represents a first step to take it to a national level. As explored in **Sections 4 and 5** of this Compendium, evidence from the project research suggests that the model can be adapted to respond to the essential skills training needs, preferences and goals of any groups.

### 1.2.1 THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES (BSF) MODEL

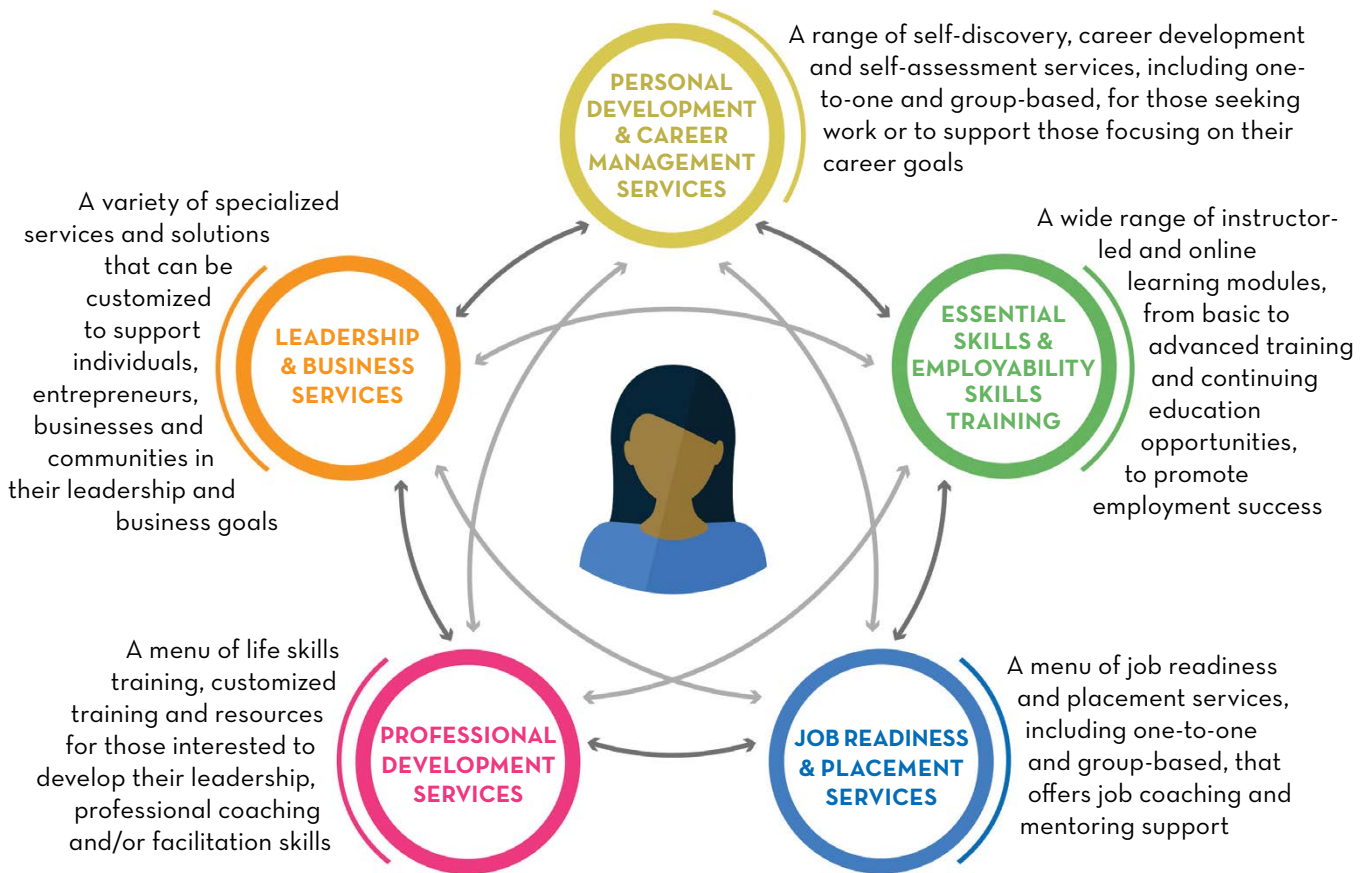
The model's flexible continuum of five components offers a full range of options for socio-economic advancement: from one-day needs assessments to foundational skills training, to job skills and business training, all the way to leadership training and links to professional networks. It also integrates employer and community connections into each component in order to build strong, proactive networks of support, opportunities and learning among participants, alumnae, staff, and our employer and community partners. Each component can be customized according to needs, interests and goals.



Graduates of the YWCA Toronto Administrative Clerk Certificate Program celebrate their success.



Figure 1: The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) Model and its Five Components





The table below (**Table 1**) describes in detail what is currently offered in each of the five components of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures model.

**Table 1: Descriptions of The Five Components of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model**

	<p>A range of self-discovery, career development and self-assessment services, including one-to-one and group-based, for those seeking work or to support those focusing on their career goals</p>
	<p>A wide range of instructor-led and online learning modules, from basic to advanced training and continuing education opportunities, to promote employment success</p>
	<p>A menu of job readiness and placement services, including one-to-one and group-based, that offers job coaching and mentoring support</p>
	<p>A menu of life skills training, customized training and resources for those interested to develop their leadership, professional coaching and/or facilitation skills</p>
	<p>A variety of specialized services and solutions that can be customized to support individuals, entrepreneurs, businesses and communities in their leadership and business goals</p>

## 1.2.2 WOMEN'S PATHWAYS THROUGH THE MODEL

A comprehensive intake process of in-depth interviews and assessments is completed for each individual prior to enrolment, to identify which products and/or services will support their immediate and long-term needs. Individuals seeking support for their employment goals all pass through our first core component: **Personal Development & Career Management Services**.

We use a range of assessment tools, including a one-to-one interview. Depending on the individual's readiness, we are able to offer options through the model or through other YWCA Toronto programs. Some applicants may be referred to other community programs—for example, to personal counselling for those who are overcoming trauma. We invite them to reapply when they are ready to take their first steps with us. Women may require additional supports while

they participate in programs. The YWCA SDC works collaboratively within our one-stop hub of services at 3090 Kingston Road, in Scarborough, Ontario, and with our approximately 50 community partners to provide the holistic range of supports for participants to move forward on their individual pathways.

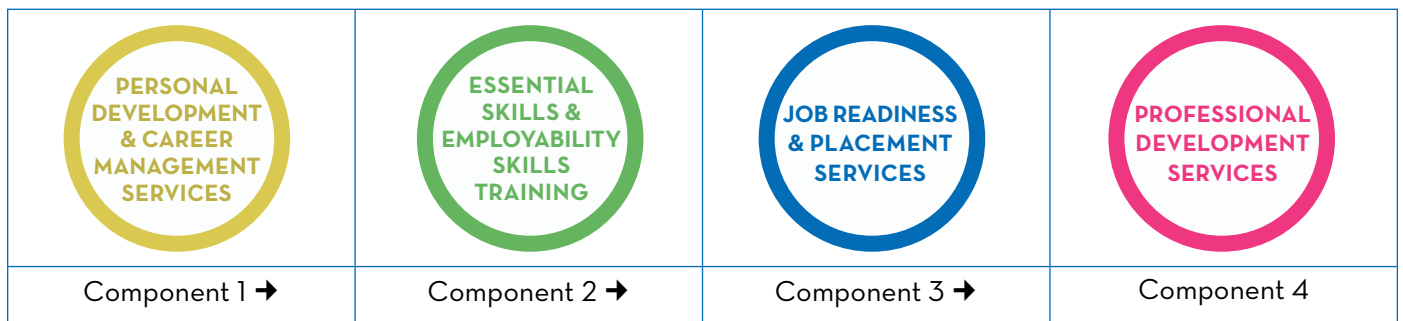
We have also built community networks of support for career and leadership advancement that can be accessed depending on a person's needs and/or stage along her pathway. We continue to reach out to participants, alumnae and all interested others through a range of media, such as regular e-blasts about new programs, services and events.

*Note: see [Appendix 2](#) for full detail on YWCA Toronto Employment and Training programs, programs and services offered at 3090 Kingston Road, and programs currently offered at the Skills Development Centre.*

### Four Women's Different Pathways through the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:

#### Sara's Pathway:

Sara is an 18-year-old single mother who finished high school but could not go on to further training/education due to lack of childcare and other family circumstances. She is now ready to pursue her career goals. Her pathway through the model starts with **Component 1**, then moves on to **Component 2** to gain the necessary essential skills training and a certification in Office Administration from our Education and Training Institute (ETI). She next moves on to **Component 3**, where she is matched with a job placement and begins her new job. As her career advances, she wants to explore opportunities in order to give back to the community as a youth leader. She comes to obtain training through YWCA Toronto's Life Skills module in **Component 4**.



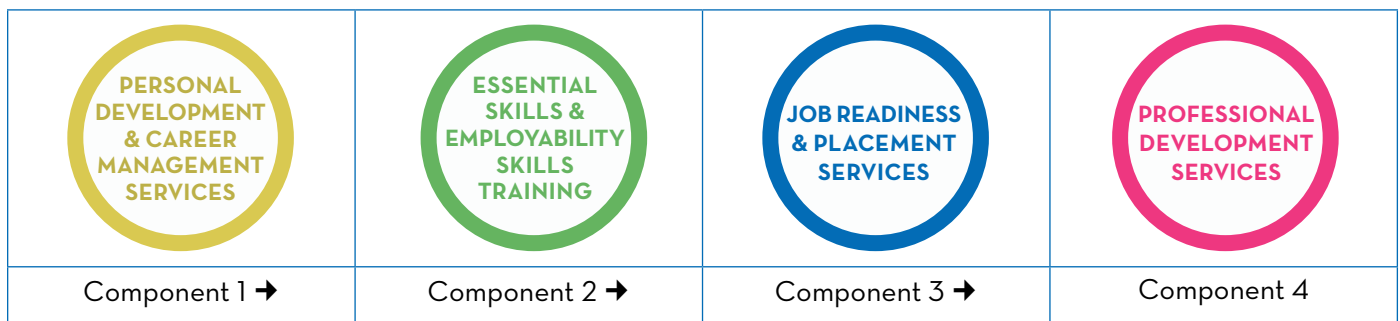
### Judy's Pathway:

Judy is 45 and a qualified teacher, but has been out of the job market for 12 years while she was raising her children. Her husband recently died, and so she is now the family “breadwinner” and needs to re-enter the labour market. She knows that her computer and “soft skills,” as well as her resume and job search techniques, must be updated. She starts with **Component 1**, then moves to **Component 2** to build on these skills. She then moves to **Component 3** for job search, placement, etc., and after finding a job is again back in her former profession.



### Adama's Pathway:

Adama is 28 and an internationally trained professional who has just arrived in Canada and needs her credentials validated before she can practice here. She is unfamiliar with the Canadian labour market and workplace culture, and also needs professional networks to help in her job search. She starts with an assessment in **Component 1**, then moves through **Component 2** to obtain the necessary essential skills to feel confident in applying for work in her new country. She next moves to **Component 3**, where she is linked to job opportunities and obtains employment, though not at the same level as in her country of origin. While in this job, she decides to gain a Canadian certification in her field. She returns to access the relevant services through **Component 4**, and can now advance in her career.



### Christine's Pathway:

Christine is a university graduate with a master's degree in journalism who has only managed to find precarious part-time work in her field. She comes to **Component 1** for assessment and moves straight on to **Component 3** for job search and placement services, through which she manages to find a full-time position with a magazine.



## CASE STUDY: SHARON'S PATHWAY

*“Over the past few months, I have completed YWCA Toronto’s Computer Training for Employment program and am currently attending their Administrative Clerk Certificate Program. I am very happy that I have been given this opportunity to learn office skills, current office practices and to have met so many wonderful people.*

*I have been out of the workforce for several years due to illness and raising children. I did not know where to start looking for a job or what skills I would need. I have been on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) for some time now and hoped to be able to work again. Dealing with a daily schedule and interactions with other people was something that concerned me a great deal.*

*The programs at YWCA Toronto have been amazing. I feel welcome and supported by the staff. It is hard to believe how much I have learned in this short amount of time. Learning how to create documents, letters, resumes and flyers with Microsoft Word; being able to use Microsoft Excel to set up charts and graphs and perform calculations; improving my typing skills; along with so many other offerings of these courses has been very exciting and rewarding. I have made friends and realized that I can function in a normal work environment. And the teachers are very good. They know the material and are just amazing!*

*I plan on completing the course and continue to work on my job application skills, including resumes, cover letters and a portfolio. One day, I would like to work as an administrative clerk. I think that working regular hours, Monday to Friday, is now possible, even taking into consideration my health. I look forward to starting a new position.”*

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### 1.2.3 INTEGRATING AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

The YWCA BSF model’s asset-based approach draws on documented research about how people move toward building sustainable futures. The stages of livelihood development identified by this research can help practitioners to identify what kind of programs, supports and services can be most timely and relevant at each stage on a person’s journey along the livelihoods continuum. The idea of a livelihoods continuum grew out of an approach to CED called the Sustainable Livelihoods approach.



## WHAT IS THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH?

The approach was developed by the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton, UK, to capture the many effects of social and economic exclusion on communities, and to learn how they can be supported to move out of poverty toward resilience and livelihoods (see <http://www.livelihoodscentre.org/documents/20720/100145/Sustainable+livelihoods+guidance+sheets>).

Sustainable Livelihoods identifies a range of livelihood asset areas that offer a holistic picture of all the capabilities, resources and entitlements that people have developed over time, as well as those they may need to build on, to make the transition forward.

*Assets are the building blocks for a future. Instead of beginning with “What don’t I have?” the approach is “What assets do I have, and how can I strengthen them?”*

Practitioners can work with people to explore and create a visual map of their assets. Mapping encourages people to think about themselves and their lives in a new, positive light. They can become more strategic about building their strengths and dealing with setbacks. They can also identify life changes both as they move through a program and after they leave to pursue their employment and livelihood goals.

### The Stages of Livelihood Development

Sustainable Livelihoods research has identified the stages of livelihood development that people may go through at different situations in their lives: from extreme destabilization, to starting to enhance their employability, building a base of stability and exploring economic possibilities, consolidating their economic opportunities, and onward toward a more sustainable future. With an understanding of these stages, practitioners can work with people to provide the most appropriate and effective supports at each stage.

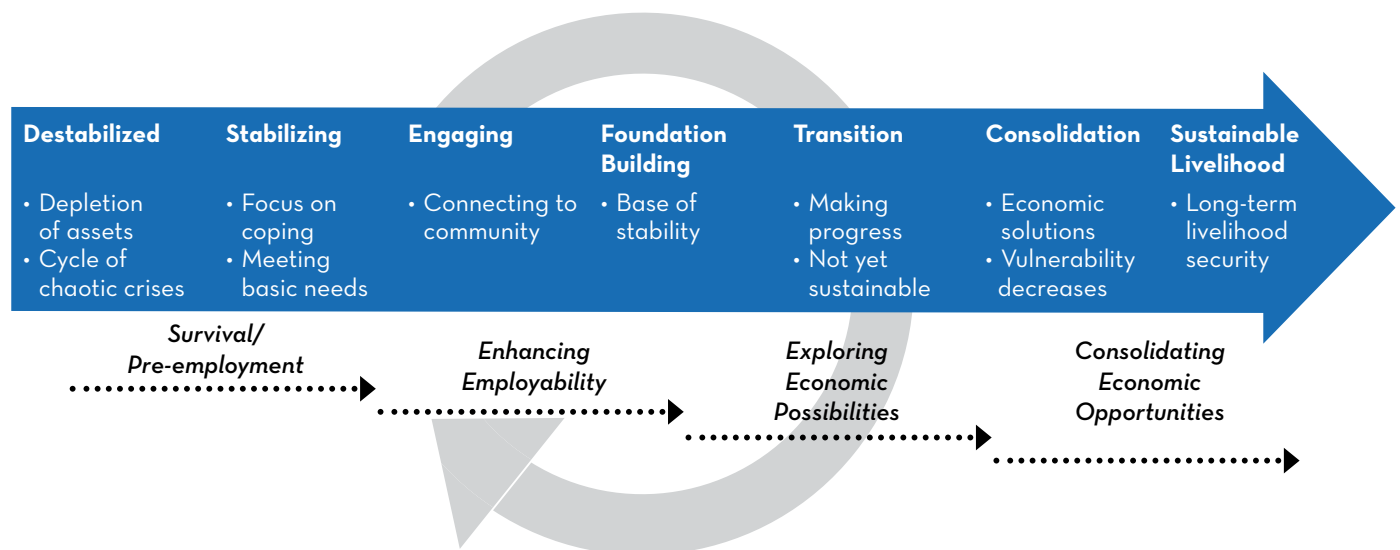
The research acknowledges that change may be a slow, gradual process for people distant from the labour market, and they can face many setbacks along the way. As indicated by the arrow in **Figure 2** on the next page, people’s movement is not linear: they can move back and forth between stages. Their lives may easily be destabilized by factors such as family crisis, job loss, health issues, etc. They may cycle back many times before moving forward toward their livelihood goals.

The Sustainable Livelihoods approach also recognizes that both the circumstances of people’s lives and larger external factors may affect their progress, often in ways beyond their control. Life circumstances can include patterns connected to where people are in their lives: for example, their reproductive choices, family roles, social relationships, etc. Larger external factors can include the systemic socio-economic forces—such as racism, gender discrimination and other, often intersecting biases and inequities—that limit people’s opportunities to move ahead.

Sustainable Livelihoods research has named this broader picture the Vulnerability Context, which can apply not just to individuals and groups but also to organizations and communities. With a focus on the whole picture, practitioners can make more active, strategic interventions to support people to prepare for setbacks, to address specific challenges, and to make decisions and advocate for themselves.



Figure 2: Stages of Livelihood Development



With permission of Sustainable Livelihoods Canada

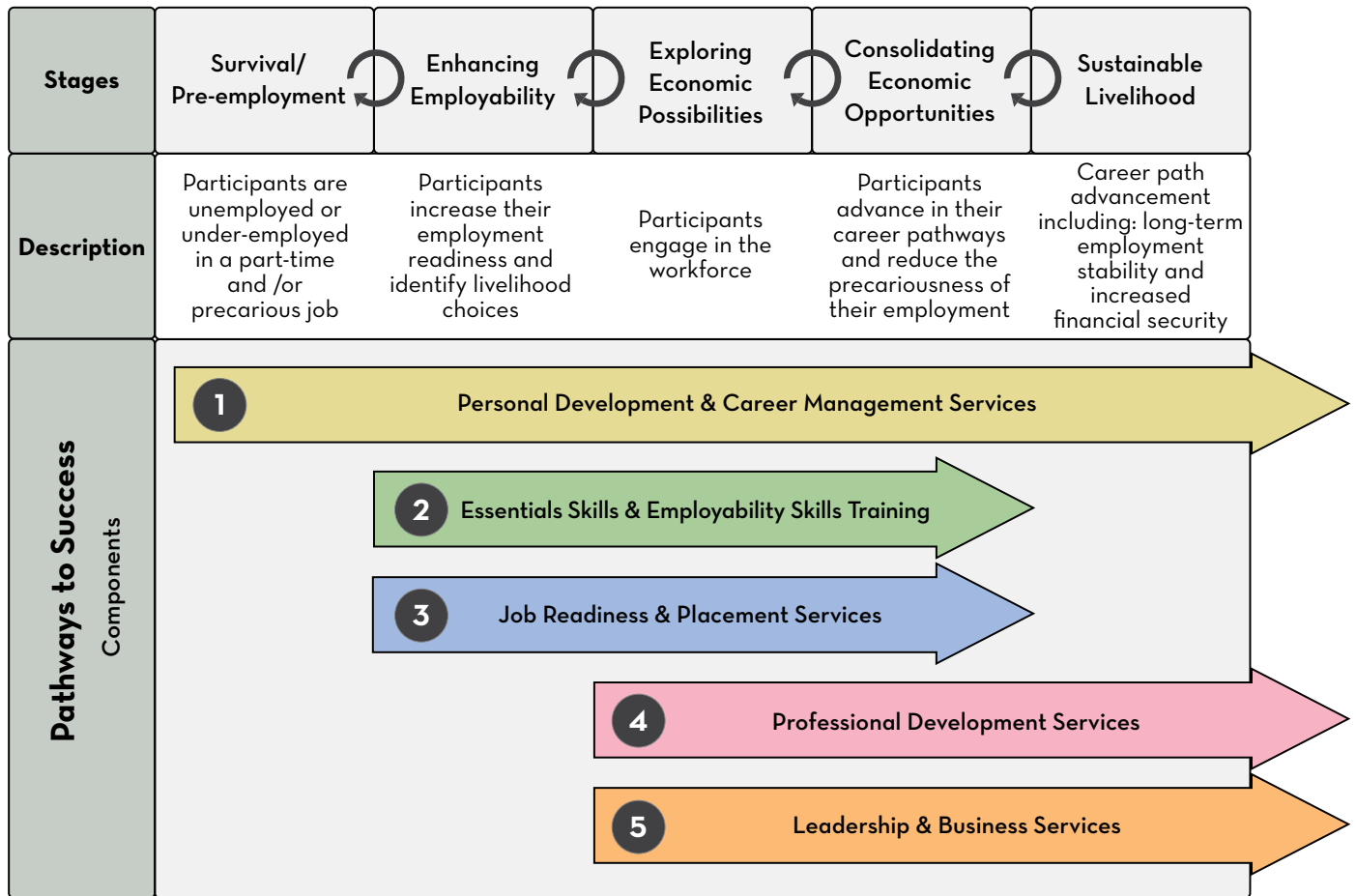
### Integrating Sustainable Livelihoods into the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model

Through a 2004-2009 Canadian Women’s Foundation (CWF) initiative to explore low-income women’s livelihood development and how practitioners can promote their outcomes, YWCA Toronto’s SDC staff were trained in the Sustainable Livelihoods approach and in a participatory asset mapping evaluation methodology based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. This framework had been designed for the CWF project by Canadian researchers. For more detail on the initiative, see [Canadian Women’s Foundation and Eko Nomos Program Development Consultants–Beyond Survival report](#).

The Sustainable Livelihoods approach fits with and has enhanced YWCA Toronto’s holistic, person-focused approach to essential skills training programs with women. It has been adapted and integrated not just into the YWCA BSF model but also into the self-discovery tools that staff use with participants, as well as into staff strategies and systems for documenting and reflecting on their programs and promising practices.

In the diagram **Figure 3** below, we have refined the Stages of Livelihood Development to capture the stages of participant involvement in the five components of the YWCA BSF model, on the pathway to a sustainable livelihood. The arrows between stages in the diagram reflect the non-linear pattern of many participants’ movement forward.

Figure 3: Stages of Livelihood Development Integrating the Five Components of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model



Adapted with permission of Sustainable Livelihoods Canada

### Exploring Assets at Two Levels: Individual Participant and Program/Organizational Capacity

YWCA SDC staff first started using asset mapping to explore five holistic asset areas with individual participants:

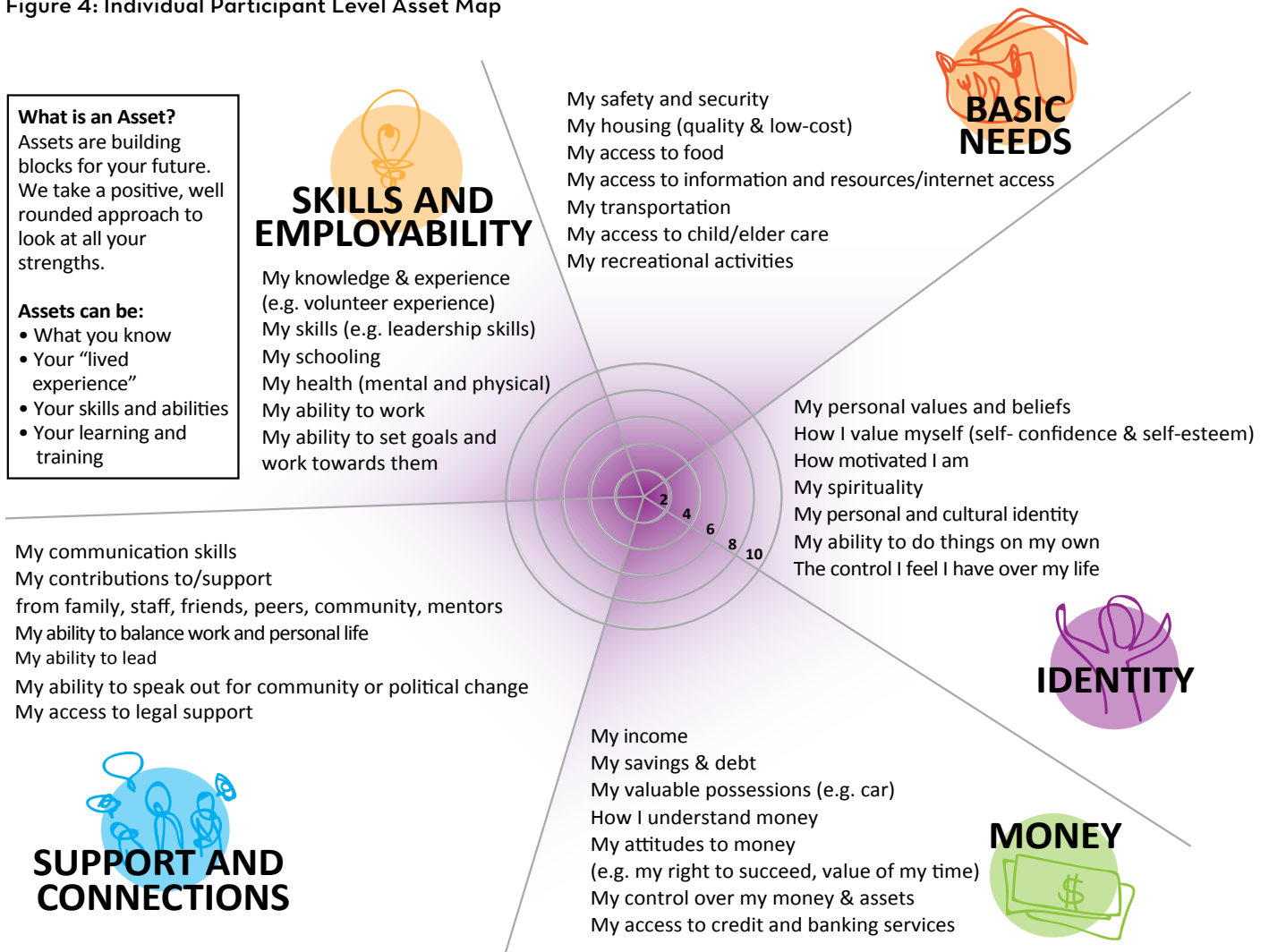
- **Social Assets:** people’s social connections, networks, contacts, etc.
- **Physical Assets:** people’s basic needs, plus access to information and services.
- **Human Assets:** skills, knowledge, education, health, leadership, etc.
- **Personal Assets:** people’s sense of personal and cultural identity, private values and beliefs, self-confidence and self-esteem, motivation and strength for personal transformation.
- **Financial Assets:** earnings, money and financial security, financial knowledge and power of decision making.

Through the YWCA BSF project, together with the project evaluation team and with input from collaborators and their program participants, we have been able to refine these original five asset mapping areas to make them more relevant for creating individual and group-based pathways to advance employment and training goals.

Asset mapping tools were created to capture information at two levels: individual participant and program/organizational capacity building.

The asset map below was used in the project for collaborators to facilitate an asset mapping process with their program participants at the individual participant level:

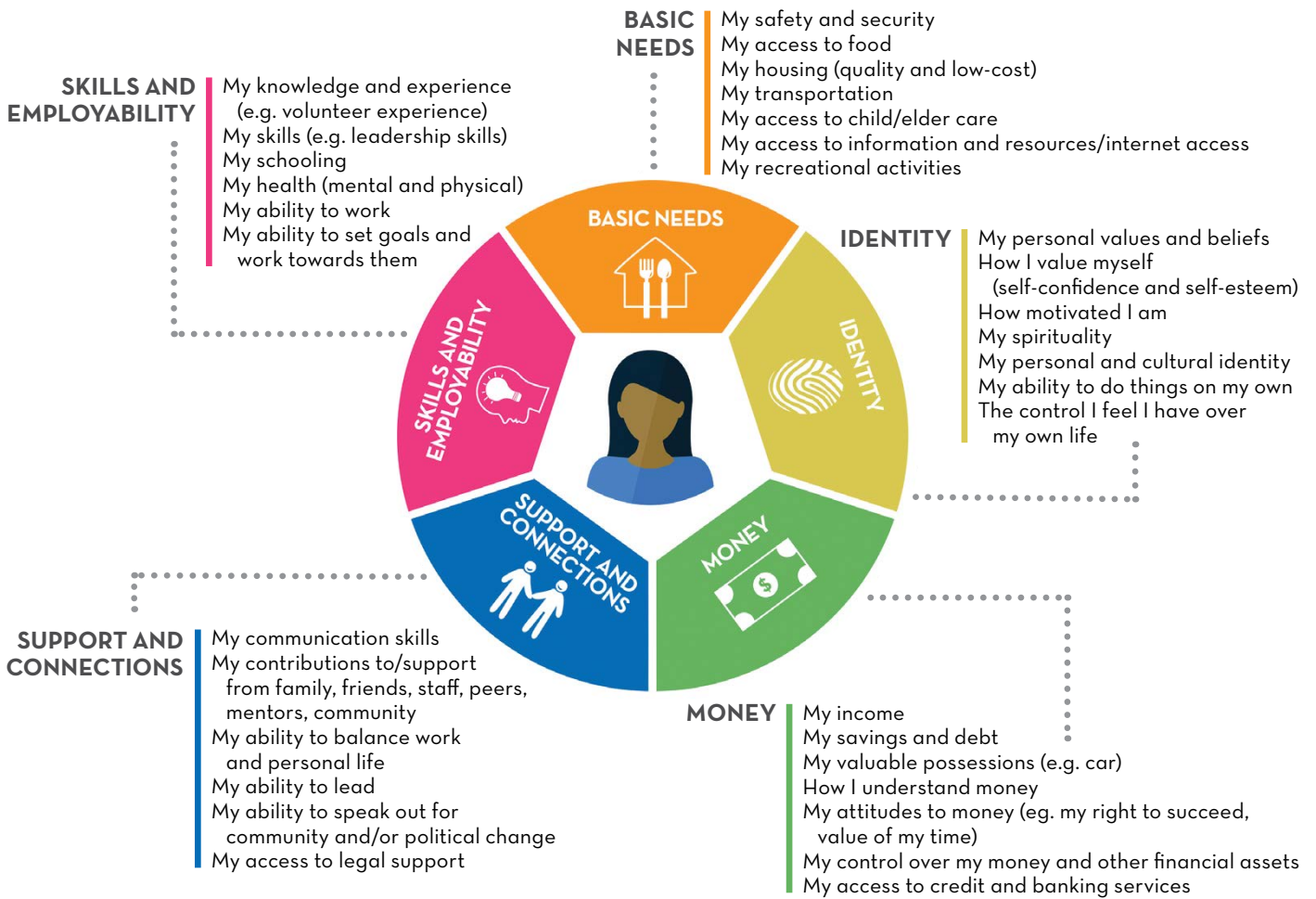
Figure 4: Individual Participant Level Asset Map



Adapted with permission of Eko Nomos and *Resources for Results*

This tool has since been further refined with new graphics as shown below, and is being branded as part of the YWCA BSF Tools.

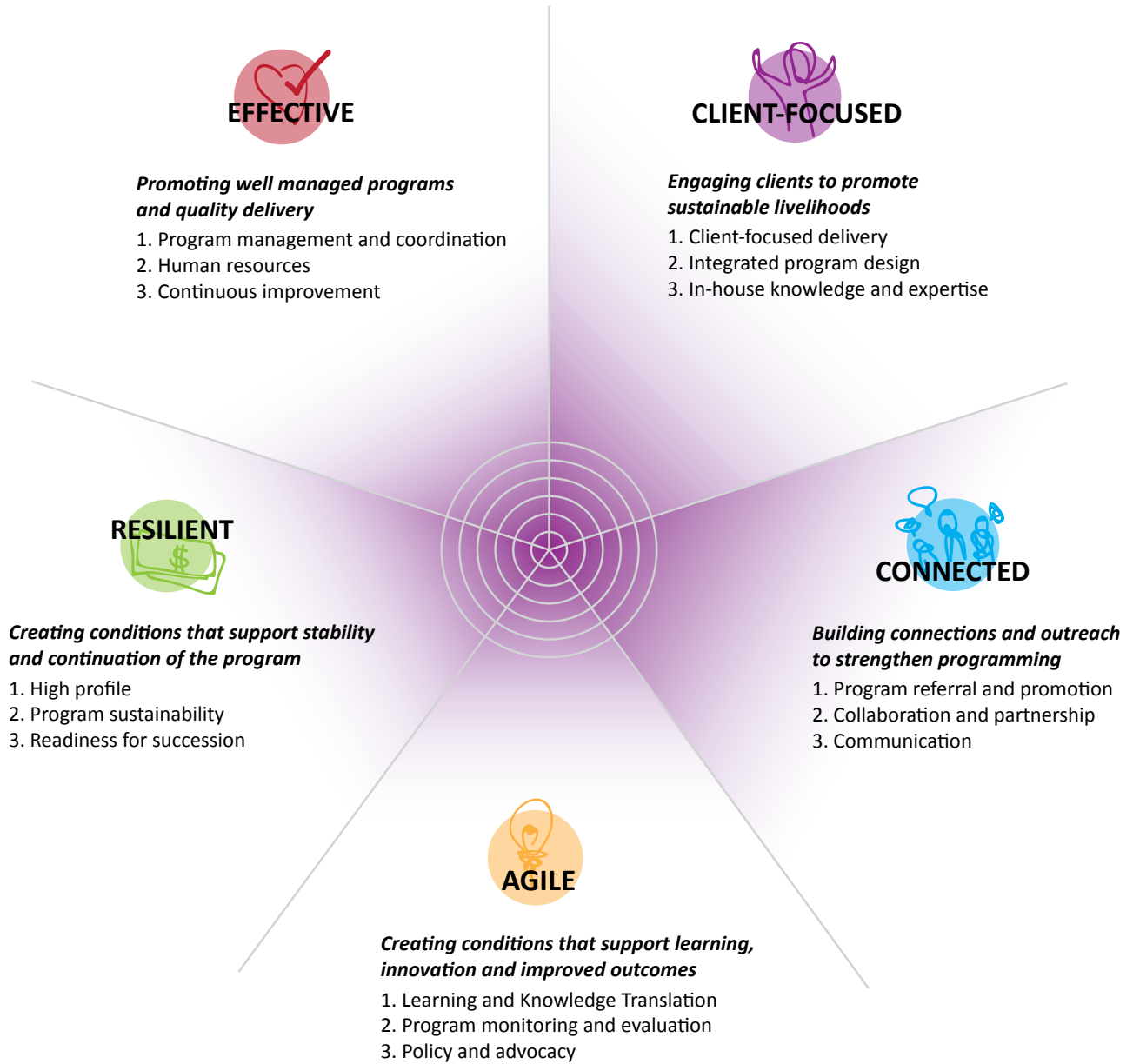
**Figure 5: The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Individual Participant Asset Map**



**What is an Asset?**  
 Assets are the building blocks for a future.  
 Assets can be: What you know, your 'lived experience', your skills and abilities, your learning and training.

The asset map below was used in the project for collaborator staff to explore and map assets at the program/organizational capacity building level:

**Figure 6: Program/Organizational Capacity Building Asset Map**

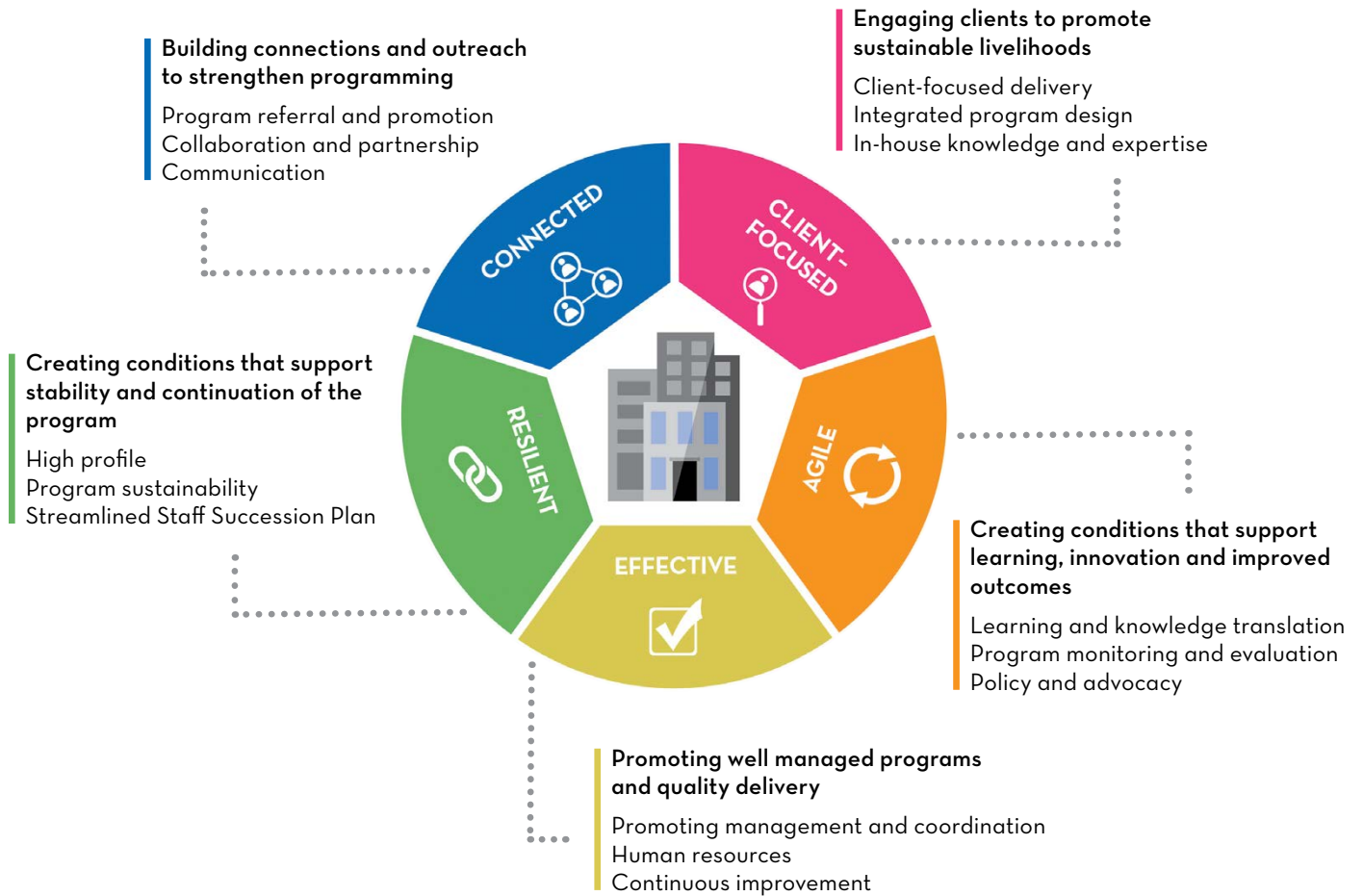


Letemendia and Associates with permission of Resources for Results and Eko Nomos



This tool has since been further refined with new graphics as shown below, and is being branded as part of the YWCA BSF Tools.

**Figure 7: Level 2: The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Program/Organizational Capacity Building Asset Map**



**What is an Asset?**  
 Assets are the building blocks for a future.



**Section 2.2** explores how these asset mapping tools evolved as they were developed through the national project, and how they were used in the participatory evaluation process to document both individual and program/organizational-level outcomes of the collaborators' adapted programs (see pp. 47-50).

### 1.2.4 INTEGRATING ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

Rather than offering essential skills training in a siloed format as a prerequisite for pre-employment training, the model integrates the nine skills intentionally into all five of its components.

#### THE NINE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified nine essential skills needed for work, learning and life: **Reading, Document Use, Numeracy, Writing, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Thinking, Computer Use and Continuous Learning.** These skills provide the foundation for learning all other skills. They enable people to evolve in their jobs and adapt to workplace change. At a very basic level, essential skills enable people to carry out different tasks, give them a starting point for learning other skills to help them adjust to change. They are used in the community and the workplace in different forms and at different levels of complexity. For more information, visit Employment and Social Development Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/tools/what-aresential-skills.html>

Today's labour market also demands a range of other critical essential skills, some of which used to be developed through on-the-job experience and/or training. Others are emerging in response to an increasingly digitalized, knowledge-based workplace. People may be expected to have many of these skills before applying for a job, and to take charge of upgrading them on an ongoing basis as their careers evolve. Formerly called soft skills, these adaptable skills have become so important to the 21st century global economy that they are being re-named in more

emphatic terms such as human skills, social skills, new-collar skills, real skills, etc. Many leaders in the field of workforce development emphasize that these skills are not all innate; they can be learned, just as people learn vocational skills.

In order to keep our skills training current with labour market trends, as well as to promote continuous learning, we are researching these emerging skills and integrating them intentionally into our YWCA BSF model informed by feedback from staff and our LinksToJobs Employers Network. We also pay close attention to participant feedback as to what new skills and competencies they would like to learn about, as they explore their employment options and life goals.

See **Appendix 3** for more detail on the nine essential skills and other critical skills, and how they are integrated into the model.

### 1.2.5 BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH THE MODEL

We are also working to test new approaches to building the capacity of our programs. We offer training within the model to individuals, groups, businesses and communities in a range of ways: at no cost, or through fee-for-service, sponsorship and/or subsidy. People can participate through funded/sponsored training for those who qualify, means-based training, or they can purchase training for themselves and/or for their employees. We have in place an outreach and marketing plan that promotes intentional, strategic relationship building with participants, employers, partners in the community and other YWCA Toronto programs. Everyone is welcome to invest: through participating in our programs, paying for programs and services, volunteering, mentoring, attending our events, joining our Learning Community or a combination of these options.

Our graduates are our best ambassadors. Through word-of-mouth, at our public and in-house events, and in our multi-media communications, they continue to share their experiences about the difference our programs have made in their lives. Many have returned to support current participants through activities such as sponsorships and mentorships.

## 1.2.6 INTEGRATING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Since 2004, we have been cultivating our YWCA Toronto LinksToJobs Employers Network and have worked with over 100 employers, employment agencies and business leaders. They not only offer support to women to find employment but also give us input into our program and curricula design, offer advice and consultation, and provide job retention and career enhancement supports such as on-the-job training, mentoring, placements, hiring, networking and training. Thorough assessment is conducted with employers to identify their organizational and business needs, as related to our current employment training programs and to placement opportunities for our participants. This strategy has shown impact at individual, program and community levels.

Such public-private sector collaboration will be vital to providing the training that workers will need if they are to take advantage of opportunities

in today's economy, especially with the projected rise in automation, which is predicted to transform and/or eliminate many old economy jobs. YWCA Toronto continues to grow its networks with the private and public sector. Between 2004 and 2016, our LinksToJobs Employer Network broadened to include employers from different sectors, such as: Health, Administration and Finance, Retail and Hospitality, Information Technology, Service, and Skills Trades. The Network now consists of over 100 employers located throughout the Greater Toronto Area, including: Royal Bank of Canada, Accenture, Deloitte, LoyaltyOne, Shoppers Drug Mart, Home Depot, Centennial College, McDonald's, VHA Home HealthCare, Yorkdale Retail services, AppleOne, and Imagine Canada. Through the national project we documented our learning about employer engagement over the years and were able to train some of our collaborators in this important feature of our model.

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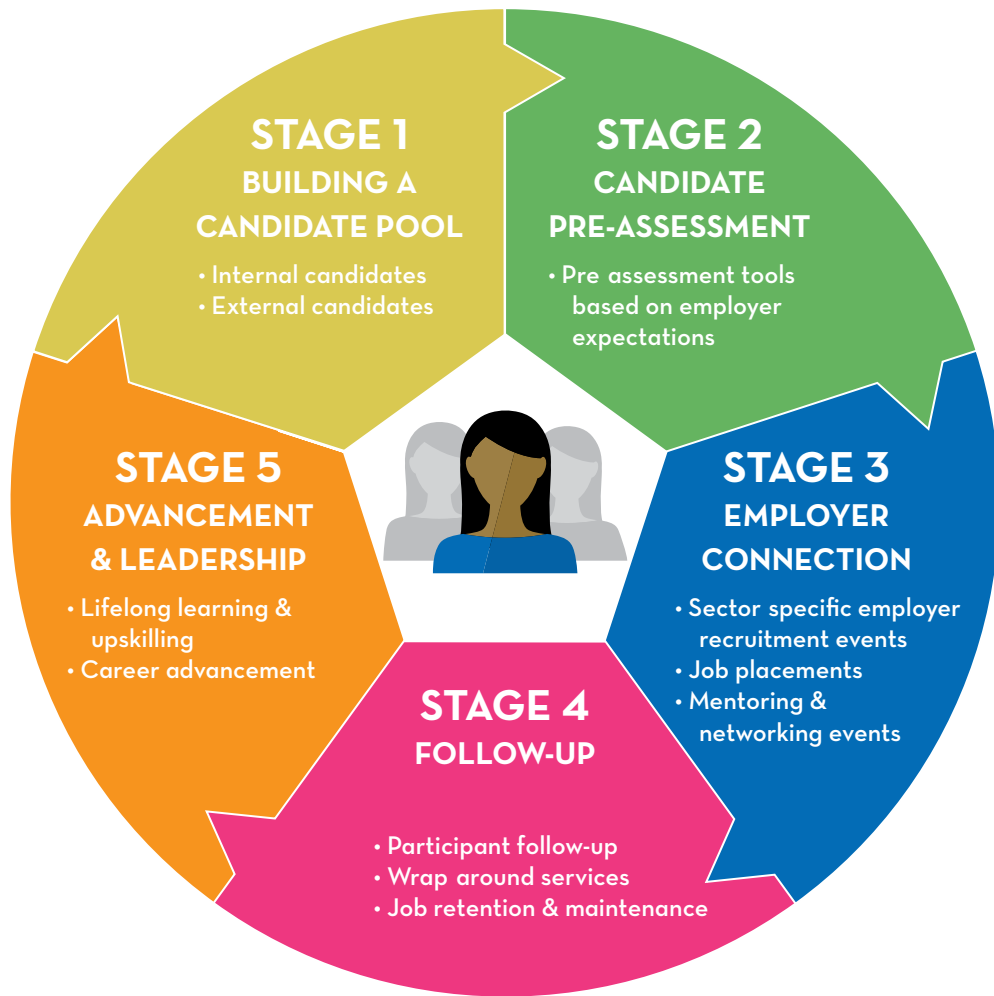
### Figure 8: Some Strategies for Employer Engagement within the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:

1. Keep the participant at the centre, to provide her with whichever components of the model will support her to prepare for, and engage and advance in today's labour market.
2. Provide opportunities through our LinksToJobs Employer Network to facilitate placements, job shadowing and mentoring and on-the-job training.
3. Promote her credentials for a direct hire.
4. Provide feedback to interviewees.
5. Provide industry standards advice.
6. Conduct an on-site Career Information Session/Speed Networking Day.
7. Host recruiting events.
8. Provide opportunities for advancement and continuous learning through our leadership training series and links to other resources.
9. Facilitate a site visit to ensure employer is meeting employment standards.
10. In collaboration with our Employment Ontario Centre, provide incentives for internship opportunities.
11. Provide testimonies.
12. Facilitate employer sponsorship of a seat/seats in a training program.
13. Participate in our Employer Advisory Committee that supports us with learning about trends and hiring practices, input into program design, and with the hosting of events and panel discussions to offer their business expertise on a pro bono basis.
14. Become a Board member and partake in community engagement.
15. Join our Learning Community to become actively involved in sharing new approaches to building a skilled and inclusive workforce.

## THE FIVE STAGES OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Employers are integrated through a Full Circle strategy into one or more components of the YWCA BSF model, as shown below:

Figure 9: Five Stages of Employer Engagement



### Stage 1: Building a Candidate Pool

YWCA Toronto maintains a database of both internal and external job seekers.

Internal Candidates are participants who are currently enrolled in one or more program and/or support within the YWCA BSF model.

External Candidates are all other job seekers in the community. They are invited to participate in one or more programs at YWCA Toronto or in the community. They may also receive support through case management with an Employment Specialist or Career Advisor.

This Candidate pool is primarily for participants who are job ready and have identified their individual employment goals.

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### Stage 2: Candidate Pre-Assessment

The goal at this stage is to support potential job-ready participants with opportunities for placements, mentoring, and networking and/or employment opportunities. In collaboration with employer partners, we have created a series of interview templates for the various sectors in which we specialize to help staff gain a better understanding of a participant's skills, experience and overall job readiness. These templates also help to build a participant's knowledge about what employers are looking for in the industry of her choice, and gain confidence as she assesses her own readiness for opportunities.

---

### Stage 3: Employer Connection

YWCA Toronto has continued to cultivate relationships with employers in a range of sectors such as: finance, human and social services, hospitality, retail, healthcare, IT and the trades sector. These connections provide participants with work experience in the form of a paid job placement, or direct hire.

Our employers also provide an array of learning forums for participants, such as mentoring events, workshops, and other activities to assist them in gaining the skills and knowledge required for success in their chosen field.

---

### Stage 4: Follow-Up

We recognize that securing employment is not the end of the journey for most of our participants. Many continue to face challenges in retaining their employment and will need supports in place beyond the training program. The provision of wrap-around services and follow-up are a key YWCA Toronto promising practice to ensure participant success. These services include: financial literacy workshops and training, and access to other community resources such as violence prevention counselling, legal advice, affordable housing and child care (huge systemic barriers for many), and to personal and community networks so that they can build on their strengths and connections.

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### Stage 5: Advancement and Leadership

Our advancement and leadership training is designed to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and the upskilling that is so vital for today's economy. We continue to work with both participants and employers to offer customized support and skills training through our later stage two BSF components. For example, our professional development services to train employers on integrating inclusive practices for team building; and soft skills training and leadership training through our professional development resources available for individuals, businesses and communities to promote lifelong learning and development.



## ZORYANA'S STORY:

Zoryana came from the Ukraine unable to afford skills upgrading courses or find sustainable income to support herself and her sick mother. She found herself at YWCA Toronto with no idea of what to expect.

### In her own words:

*“Not being able to find a job has affected me financially and emotionally. I started thinking about what was wrong with me; why I’m not getting the job even though I graduated from college with great marks? It made me think less of myself, which is tough because I try to be optimistic all the time. Wherever you go you have to pay for food, for shelter, for everything. I want to travel, I want to take courses to upgrade my skills, but I can’t afford it. I always have this last hope that I am going to find a job, because I don’t want to go on social assistance.*”

*“I worked as a babysitter in my previous job, making \$12 an hour to take care of two young children. It was not ideal, but it was better than working at the grocery store. When I worked there as a cashier, I experienced discrimination based on my origin.... While I was working, a customer came in and asked me something I didn’t understand. I asked him to repeat it. He said ‘Don’t you understand English?’ It was so offensive to me and I almost started crying. It was very hurtful. Income is important to me. I don’t have children, but my mom’s health is not good. I don’t want to put her in a centre for seniors. I’m over 30; I am thinking to myself that I need to start contributing and taking care of her. All the things she needs cost money and I can’t afford it. It makes me feel sad, but I don’t lose hope.*”

*“I came to YWCA Toronto after a friend referred me. Spending five years in school in Ukraine and not having my credentials recognized, I realized I needed to start from scratch. She told me YWCA Toronto is a great place for me to go and to take some courses and upgrade my skills. I was skeptical, but when I started taking the Professional Office Administration course, I really enjoyed it. Then I decided to go for a career assessment and took the Computer Skills for Employment program.*”

*“Before I came to YWCA Toronto, I was not very confident; I could not find a job and I was not sure of what the organization did. I found out that here you can apply for jobs and take courses at the same time, instead of sitting at home feeling hopeless. At YWCA Toronto, I met wonderful people amongst staff and participants. Staff members are experienced and professional. They were willing to help me in any way possible. This is very rare. I also found my support here among my new friends. That is so powerful because when you leave YWCA, you leave with strength and belief in a better future. I would love to see more opportunities for women, because women in our society are the centre of everything. Women are mothers, wives, and people; they have great skills that a lot of people don’t see. So often women are down on themselves; we are always criticizing ourselves and we don’t see what great skills we have. YWCA Toronto is doing a great job helping women to develop their work skills and build their confidence. For myself, I love volunteering and have gained so much experience through unpaid work. My journey hasn’t come to the end because I haven’t found a job yet, but with the help of YWCA Toronto, I’ve prepared myself well enough to get a job.”*

## 1.2.7 BUILDING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As YWCA Toronto has learned from the experience of working with our community, it is crucial to break down the siloed, deficit-focused approach to essential skills programs and services that continues to perpetuate the socio-economic exclusion of underserved people. Lack of collaboration also results in duplication and inefficiencies of services, within an already-stretched funding environment for non-profit organizations.

Through taking an asset-based lens to CED, we are now working to create more intentional, coordinated and strategic partnerships among non-profit, public and business sectors. To find collective solutions to workforce development in today's knowledge-based economy, all stakeholders can invest in providing sustained employment and learning opportunities, especially for those distant from the labour market. The emphasis of this positive approach is not just on connecting people to jobs but also on enriching our whole communities through their active inclusion.

In Toronto, we work closely with the Scarborough Business Associations, and with other networks such as the Scarborough Employment Opportunities Partnership Table and East Toronto Human Resources Professionals Association. Building non-profit/private sector partnerships such as these are a key feature of our model. See below for a case study of one example.



### CASE STUDY: RBC Pilot Initiative

#### Building Sustainable Futures Series


#### Preparing young women for success in today's world of work

This initiative started as a small pilot in 2014, when the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) was interested in collaborating with YWCA Toronto not just through philanthropic donation but by actively involving their employees. Together with RBC, we designed the pilot to offer workshops to the most vulnerable women and young women in our high-priority neighbourhoods. For the pilot, we drew on our YWCA BSF model to offer them core and optional components. We have since continued to work with RBC to create workshops, one-day networking and mentoring events, that involve their employees and our participants, in addition to offering workshops and other resources. RBC has been very interested in the emerging promising outcomes. The pilot has also shown promise in inspiring participants to attend other more comprehensive YWCA Toronto programs. This year, we expanded to other high-priority neighbourhoods and continue to work with the RBC team as one of our many community and business sector partnerships.

Figure 10: Building Sustainable Futures Series Outreach Flyer

1

## BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES SERIES



This program is generously funded by the Royal Bank Foundation.

**YWCA Toronto has partnered with the RBC Foundation to offer a dynamic employment and leadership program that prepares young women (under the age of 29) for today's labour market and provides them with strategies to help build the foundation for their success.**

Participants can access one or more of the five YWCA Building Sustainable Futures components to create their pathway to success.


**By the end of the program, graduates achieve:**


- a personal action plan based on asset mapping in five areas: Basic Needs, Skills and Employability, Support and Social Connections, Identity, and Money;
- a career pathway that is individualized and can be adapted along their journey;
- the skills required to explore career opportunities for their future;
- increased financial literacy skills—including budgeting ideas and saving tips;
- a better understanding of workplace rights and safety;
- access our leadership series to encourage lifelong learning; and
- an enhanced understanding of employer expectations, and connections with mentors.

**Take Control of Your Future—let YWCA Toronto help you!**

YWCA Toronto, 3090 Kingston Rd (at McCowan Rd), Suite 300, Scarborough  
For more information and/or to register, please contact  
**416.269.0091 x231 or [buildingfutures@ywcatoronto.org](mailto:buildingfutures@ywcatoronto.org).**

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3090 Kingston Rd, Suite 300, Scarborough | T 416.269.0090 | F 416.269.0114  
Monday–Friday, 8:30am–4:30pm | [ywcatoronto.org/employment](http://ywcatoronto.org/employment) | 

In the national project, we have been able to work with our collaborators to build on their own community engagement strategies as a part of our Learning Community. We hope to foster more such pilot research projects at YWCA Toronto and support other entities across Canada that promote new forms of partnership.

See pp. 36-40 for more detail on our 2016-2018 employer and community partnership building strategies.

### 1.2.8 CHALLENGES OF THE MODEL

**Capacity and Resources:** The main challenge we face is our limited capacity and resources to answer to the demands for our employment and training programs. Due to changing outcomes-based funding requirements, as well as budgetary and other constraints faced by the employment training sector across Canada, there remains a gap between our vision for the YWCA BSF model and what we are currently able to offer of its programs and services.

**Meeting the Need for Foundational Skills Building and Wrap-around Supports:** Another, related challenge is that many of our participants' life situations are unstable and subject to sudden changes. They may experience multiple setbacks in their steps toward a sustainable future. It can be hard for us to support all those who may fall back due to past trauma and/or crises in their lives. Staff are also stretched to offer much-needed foundational building essential skills training and wrap-around supports, especially where we are not compensated for such a vital component of our program model.

**Building Partnerships in a Competitive Funding Environment:** A further challenge is that although community partnership and collaboration are among the pillars of our model, it can take time and effort to build these relationships when service providers are competing for the same pot of funding and employer partnerships.

In response, we continue to review our strategies for capacity building and explore ways to ensure the resilience of our existing essential skills for employment programs. We also continue to promote a strength-based CED approach as the way of the future, to build a skilled and inclusive social economy.

The stories of our participants and alumnae bear witness that our holistic employment and training model works to build more sustainable livelihoods. Women have told us about the many positive changes they have experienced in their lives as a result of participating in our programs, and how we have supported them on their pathways to success. Through the SDC and through our national BSF project, we have documented evidence that the YWCA BSF model and its regional adaptations are showing promise in addressing the employment and training needs of diverse underserved populations. Combining a more entrepreneurial approach with a strong focus on social purpose appears to inspire everyone to think outside the box and find creative ways to work together while respecting each other's experience and expertise.

# SECTION 2: The National YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Project

2





## OVERVIEW

This national project grew out of our interest to learn about how YWCA Toronto's holistic, asset-based approach to essential skills for employment programming with low-income women in Toronto might be adapted to build the foundational skills of other demographic groups distant from the labour market, in order to promote a skilled and inclusive workforce. We also wanted to learn more and stimulate knowledge exchange about building capacity to sustain, grow and advocate for the field of essential skills programming.

The project was launched in 2014 and will wrap up in March 2019.

The overall goal of the project was to increase the essential skills of underserved individuals so that they can prepare for, and engage and advance in today's workforce, and move toward greater socio-economic security.

The initial focus was to be women-specific, but broadened through the planning process and selection of our collaborator associations to become gender inclusive. Individuals from four underserved populations—Indigenous, immigrants, mature, and youth—participated in the project research, the majority of them women.

The developmental research methodology and evaluation tools were designed to involve the voices of all stakeholders in the project learning collaborative: from program participants, program alumnae, practitioners and employers to our many other partners engaged in supporting this community-based initiative (for a capsule definition of Developmental Evaluation, see above, p. 15).

### At-a-Glance Overall Project Objectives:

- To learn by sharing YWCA Toronto's approach to essential skills training nationally whether it could be adapted as a model successfully to other regions and demographic groups across Canada.
- For collaborators to learn from each other's experience and expertise in designing and delivering programs customized to their diverse communities.
- To document key promising practices and lessons learned from this national initiative as a contribution to building the capacity of essential skills training organizations nationally to promote a skilled and inclusive workforce.
- To create a community of learning and knowledge exchange to improve the prospects of economic security, equality and sustainable futures for all.

A core aim of the project was to promote a continuous cycle of:

- A. participants moving toward building stronger futures** through: essential skills development, further education and training, becoming gainfully employed/self-employed, active roles in their communities and in broader society;
- B. increased collaborator program/organizational capacity** to deliver integrated essential skills programming to underserved communities, strengthening program sustainability and expertise in employment training; and
- C. building the capacity of essential skills organizations nationally** through knowledge exchange, and as a result increasing the essential skills of Indigenous Peoples, youth, immigrants and mature workers to improve their socio-economic prospects.

## 2.1 ENGAGING OUR PROJECT COLLABORATORS

Through a Request for Funding Proposal process, we invited YWCA Member Associations already delivering employment and training programs in their communities to be trained in our asset-based approach and emerging model in order to design, implement, document and refine their own regional adaptations of the program model. Many Associations were interested in participating. Ultimately, we expanded the reach to nine Associations—including YWCA Toronto—representing a broad geographic spectrum, from coast to coast, and including one Association offering programs in both official languages.

The nine collaborator Associations:

1. YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, Nunavut
2. YWCA Halifax, Nova Scotia
3. YWCA Hamilton, Ontario
4. YWCA Metro Vancouver, British Columbia
5. YWCA Moncton, New Brunswick
6. YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, Ontario—English/French
7. YWCA Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
8. YWCA Thompson, Manitoba
9. YWCA Toronto, Ontario

The initial plan for the project was to produce four demographic group-specific program models and curricula for testing and eventual inclusion in the second Compendium and the Toolkit. However, as a number of collaborators began to refine the design of their models and curricula, it became clear that participants in many of the collaborators' essential skills programs would be from more than one of the four identified groups. For example, YWCA Saskatoon works with many Indigenous and immigrant youth while YWCA Metro Vancouver's program is open to women of any age and works with many immigrants.

A further issue was that although collaborators had originally identified a specific demographic group/groups for their project programs, others in their respective communities were coming forward to apply for essential skills training. To respond to these needs, they broadened their intake criteria accordingly.

Collaborators were required to test and document outcomes of their own regionally adapted essential skills programs for the project research. These programs are referred to below as the pilot programs. See **Section 3** below for detail on our collaborators and their pilot adaptations of the emerging YWCA Toronto model.

### YWCA Toronto's Role in the Project:

Through YWCA Toronto's Skills Development Centre (SDC), we have played a three-fold role in the project as

- Lead and facilitator
- Researcher: to incubate, document and refine our approach as a model, to be branded as the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model
- Co-collaborator in the 2015-2016 pilot program research process: we would be documenting just one of our YWCA Toronto Essential Skills for Employment (ESE) programs, the Administrative Clerk Certificate Program offered by YWCA Toronto's Education and Training Institute (ETI)

*Note: the working title of this national project was originally the YWCA Essential Skills for Employment (ESE) Project. The project team is therefore referred to below as YWCA Toronto's ESE team.*

## 2.1.1 PROJECT REQUIREMENTS 2014-2018

To meet the project objectives and outcomes, collaborators in the five-year national research were required to:

### 2014-2015:

- compile and share their Association's promising employment programs and curricula, to be disseminated through the project learning community and the Compendium and Toolkit;
- implement start-up and planning for a pilot program adaptation of the emerging YWCA Toronto BSF essential skills model;
- initiate or continue to engage in an employer and/or community partnership strategy to support employment and training outcomes of the project;
- prepare to integrate an asset-based Sustainable Livelihoods approach and tools into their program model framework and curriculum, and to participate in a first national learning forum facilitated by YWCA Toronto;
- build and refine their model and curriculum as needed to include promising practices and resources shared by the learning community; and
- participate in the learning community through ongoing consultations with collaborators.

### 2015-2017:

- design an outreach and recruitment strategy for their program model;
- adapt their program model to include promising practices shared by collaborators (as feasible and suitable);
- test their adapted model and curriculum through the implementation of a four- to ten-week pilot program for a minimum of 20 participants, and provide job placement support and track employment outcomes for up to six months;
- participate in the national developmental evaluation of the pilots using the asset-based methodology and tools designed for the project (2015-2016);
- document their program model and individual participant and program/organizational capacity outcomes, including lessons learned; and
- continue to nurture and develop relevant partnerships with employers and community partners.

### 2017-2018:

- finalize their adapted program models, curricula, learning and promising practices for contribution to this Compendium and the accompanying Toolkit;
- continue to develop their program/organizational capacity building strategies; and
- participate in knowledge exchange about the project through national, regional and local community networks across Canada interested to learn more about building a skilled and inclusive workforce.

## 2.1.2 ADAPTING COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

Our collaborator Associations work with a wide range of needs in their communities and in diverse local contexts, and the Associations vary in size and capacity. Although they were interested in drawing on all five components of the emerging YWCA BSF model (see above, **Figure 1**) for their regional adaptations, as the research unfolded it became apparent that most Associations did not yet have the capacity to add the later stage components, and that some were working mainly at the pre-employment stage with their participants.

Since this difference between collaborators focusing on the pre-employment stage and those working with some participants at a more job-ready stage only emerged over the course of the research process, it was not reflected in the 2015-2016 outcomes data reported by the evaluation team (for more on this issue, see below, p. 48, Key Considerations About the Evaluation).

See **Section 3** for detail on the pilot program models and their selected components from the YWCA BSF model.

As part of their regional program adaptations, collaborators would also include an employer/community engagement strategy tailored to the socio-economic conditions of their particular local context—for example, rural versus urban.

### 2.1.3 VALUE-ADDED FEATURES OF THE PROJECT

#### Mapping Program/Organizational Capacity

To help build the field of essential skills programming nationally, YWCA Toronto also designed the project to apply an asset-based approach to explore how collaborators could build their program/organizational capacity to sustain and grow their essential skills programs.

With input from collaborators, YWCA Toronto's ESE team and the evaluation team developed an asset mapping tool for collaborators to reflect on and assess their own organizational capacities in program delivery, in order to identify both strengths and areas of potential improvement.

#### Building a Learning Community

Through the project, YWCA Toronto aimed to create a Learning Community: a forum for all voices to speak out to influencers in business, government and the broader community to show the importance of giving underserved populations the confidence, resilience and foundational skills to move forward toward sustainable futures.

## 2.2 PROJECT ROLL-OUT AND ACTIVITIES

### 2.2.1 START-UP: 2014-2015

YWCA Toronto began the research process with an in-house review of our approach to essential skills programs at YWCA Toronto's SDC, in order to document the approach as a model. We also documented some of the learning from our strategies for integrating foundational skills building training.

Once the eight other collaborators were selected, YWCA Toronto's ESE team hosted a first, two-day training forum in Toronto in March 2015. Collaborators shared their regional experience

and expertise, program models and promising practices. An informative discussion followed about the challenges of their work to support underserved participants toward more prosperous futures in the context of unstable funding, their local labour markets, and an increasingly competitive, knowledge-based socio-economy.

In spring/summer 2015, YWCA Toronto's ESE team facilitated training with collaborators in our adaptation of the Sustainable Livelihoods approach, and in our approach to integrating essential skills. With the external evaluation team hired for the pilot research phase of the project, we also facilitated training for collaborators in the evaluation methodology and tools designed for this phase (2015-2016; see below in this Section for detail). Collaborators then began to integrate this shared learning into their program models and curricula, in preparation for delivering their pilot programs. Since they were at different levels of readiness in the design of their models, YWCA Toronto's ESE team offered them continuous support through remote training, conference calls, coaching, and other resources. This preparation phase involved a tremendous amount of effort from everyone involved—we were all learning on the job.

### 2.2.2 THE PILOT PROGRAMS AND EVALUATION PROCESS: 2015-2016

Throughout the pilot phase, YWCA Toronto's ESE team assisted each collaborator with troubleshooting for the launch and delivery of their regionally adapted programs, with design and implementation of their outreach and recruitment strategies, and with the collection of research data about their outcomes. During this year, collaborators implemented the national evaluation process. Together with the evaluation team, YWCA Toronto's ESE team then began the process of collating outcomes documentation in summer 2016. The evaluators produced two draft reports, one on individual outcomes and one on capacity outcomes, in November 2016.

### Evaluation Tools At-a-Glance:

#### For Level 1: Individual Participant

A retrospective 29-question, online participant outcomes survey tool; interviews with YWCA Toronto staff, participant tracking/reporting, two in-depth telephone interviews conducted by evaluation team with collaborator teams, end-of-program calls by evaluation team to follow up on participant employment and training outcomes.

#### For Level 2: Program/ Organizational Capacity Building

Facilitation of a participatory pre/post self-assessment of capacity using the Pilot Capacity Asset Guide and Map; key informant interviews conducted by evaluation team with collaborator teams and with YWCA Toronto staff.

### Key Considerations about the Evaluation

- Since it was not yet clear at the beginning of the evaluation design that some collaborators would only draw on the early stage components of YWCA Toronto's model, the evaluation did not separate the outcomes of pilots working at the pre-employment stages from those working with some more job-ready participants.
- Two collaborators' pilot programs (YWCAs Halifax and Hamilton) could not be included in the 2015-2016 evaluation outcomes data (see below **Section 3, Overview** for more detail on this issue). Data was collected subsequently (2017-2018) from the programs of YWCAs Halifax and Hamilton, and from other collaborators who added to their program cohorts and statistics about employment and training outcomes (see below **Section 4—Project Findings**).

### Evaluation Strategy and Tools for the Collaborator Pilot Programs

The evaluation requirements of this project were to track, document and report on the outcomes of the four- to ten-week pilot program models delivered and followed up on by collaborators for up to six months over 2015-2016. In keeping with the developmental approach of the national initiative, YWCA Toronto and the evaluation team worked to design an evaluation strategy, tools and processes that accurately reflected this approach. A mixed method approach was also adopted, to allow the cross-checking of data from a range of sources.

Together with the evaluators and collaborators, and with the input of program participants, YWCA Toronto's ESE team developed asset-based tools to explore outcomes at two levels:

1. **Individual Participant Level: to capture changes in individual participants' lives as a result of participating in the pilot programs.**

#### *Individual Participant Asset Maps:*

At the first national forum, YWCA Toronto's ESE team and the evaluation team drew on collaborators' employment program experience to identify the expected transitional outcomes of their pilot programs for participants—the strengths or assets people might develop in the short to medium term as a result of participation. This raw information was processed to create a map of these transitional outcomes.

Collaborators facilitated the completion of pre- and post-program delivery asset maps with individual participants to assess their strengths at the beginning and end of their participation, and to give themselves and the researchers an idea of changes in their lives as a result of being in the program. Depending on their program population, some collaborators chose to implement the mapping process as a group exercise, while others implemented it one-to-one with participants.



### **Participant Outcomes Survey:**

A 29-question retrospective Participant Outcomes Survey was designed drawing on the asset map to explore outcomes in the five asset areas and some more general questions about changes as a result of the programs, and about employment/training outcomes (see [Appendix 4](#) for the survey).

Collaborator feedback was solicited for the language of both the asset area descriptions and the survey questions, to make sure they were appropriate, respectful and clear. For example, one of the collaborators, YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, adapted the map using another educational resource to reflect its Inuit program population’s language and cultural perspective (see YWCA Agvvik Nunavut’s collaborator program profile, [Section 3.1.1](#), for an image of the map).

## **2. Program/Organizational Capacity Level: to capture collaborators’ self-report on changes in their organizational capacity to deliver their programs as a result of participating in the project.**

The aim of this mapping process was to train the trainers: collaborators could integrate capacity assessment into their own program/organizational structures and processes as part of their evaluative thinking, in order to be more strategic and innovative in ensuring the future of their programs. For the project, they were not required to assess the overall capacities of their Association, only those organizational capacities related to the delivery of their pilot programs. Collaborators implemented the map with staff at two stages: pre- and post-program delivery (June 2015 and June 2016), to reflect on changes in capacity as a result of participating in the project.

At the end of 2016, YWCA Toronto hosted a second national learning forum where collaborators gave presentations on their models, challenges, successes and lessons learned. YWCA Toronto also facilitated a presentation on employer engagement. The meeting closed with a planning session for the future: to solicit input for the design of the Compendium and dissemination strategies, and to discuss how program/organizational knowledge of staff can be safeguarded and passed on in a context of unstable funding and high staff turnover. Collaborators then went back to reflect on their learning, in order to prepare their program models and their three “top” lesson plans and promising practices for contribution to the Compendium and Toolkit.

### **2.2.3 ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF COLLABORATOR PROGRAM MODELS, CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE: 2017-2018**

Over this period, YWCA Toronto’s ESE team supported collaborators to continue exploring outcomes and lessons learned so far from the project by reviewing their program models and curricula in order to identify what worked and what did not. Collaborators also had the opportunity to conduct further internal review into their strategies for building program/organizational capacity. A number of Associations—Halifax, Metro Vancouver, National Capital Region, Saskatoon and Thompson—worked with YWCA Toronto on-site and at-a-distance for Train the Trainers coaching, which they could add to their programs in order to integrate more of the later-stage components of the YWCA BSF model, depending on their program design and capacity and their program population.

YWCA Toronto facilitated focus groups and held two employer engagement events in Toronto, in 2017 and 2018 respectively, that brought together employer partners from various sectors within the community to learn about how organizations can continue to bridge the gap between underserved communities and employment opportunities. YWCAs Moncton and Saskatoon were linked into the 2018 knowledge-exchange event to contribute their learning at-a-distance. Some collaborators—Halifax, Hamilton, Metro Vancouver, National Capital Region and Saskatoon—were refining their strategies to enhance employer connections within their communities.

YWCA Toronto has continued to share project updates and learning with a dedicated list serve of those interested in employment and training programs that work with marginalized communities. We also refined the YWCA BSF asset-based tools, updating language and visuals in our graphics. National collaborators are still experimenting with new ways to network with other essential skills organizations in their communities, to build capacity and to share the learning from this project.

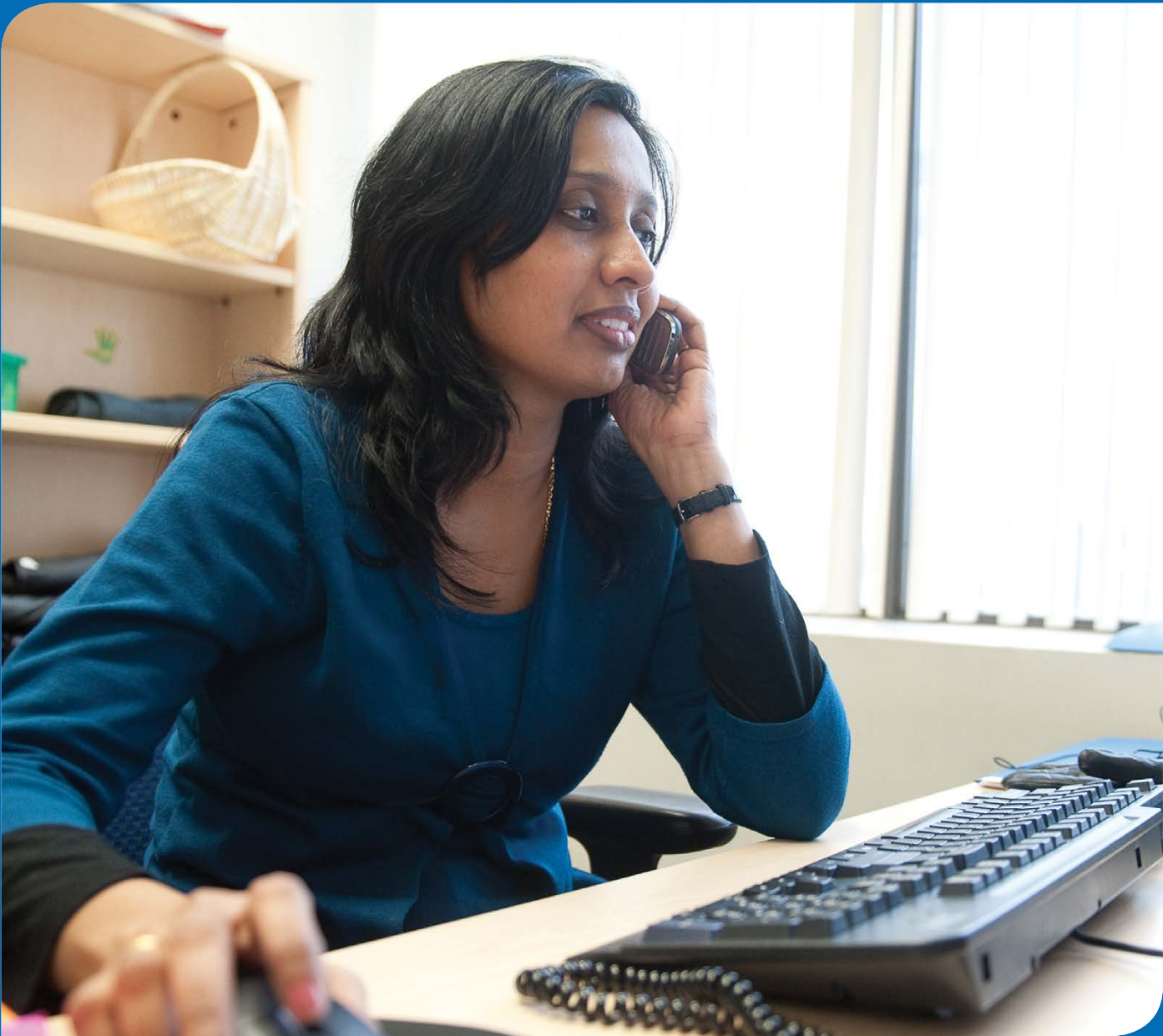
By March 2018, all collaborators were to contribute their learning and most promising practices, curricula and lesson plans for inclusion in the Compendium and complementary Toolkit. As explored below in **Section 4.2**, some collaborators experienced challenges in meeting their deliverables. YWCA Toronto’s ESE team has been able to work with them to resolve and/or mitigate these issues in order to include contributions from all collaborators.

In late June 2018, YWCA Toronto and YWCA Metro Vancouver hosted a wrap up third national learning forum in Vancouver for collaborators to share learning from their various communities across Canada. Collaborators who attended this final forum and joined in at-a-distance, and those who reported to YWCA Toronto’s ESE team on their learning, observed how much the national collaborative has contributed in terms of giving them the tools and strategies to keep innovating as they invest in the future of their own programs and communities.



In June 2018, the YWCA ESE Team held a national learning forum in Vancouver, BC. The YWCA Metro Vancouver team share learnings from their program adaptation of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures model.

# SECTION 3: Regional Adaptations of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model



3

## OVERVIEW



The nine collaborator Associations serve a diverse range of communities across Canada, including urban, rural and remote. Of the nine Associations, six designed, delivered and documented women-specific programs for the research. The programs of YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region, YWCA Saskatoon and YWCA Thompson were gender inclusive. YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region was the one collaborator program in both official languages.

Some programs—such as in Agvvik Nunavut, Hamilton, National Capital Region, Saskatoon and Toronto—were industry specific. Both Agvvik Nunavut and Hamilton offered programs focused on small business development. Others—Halifax, Metro Vancouver, Moncton and Thompson—focused more generally on supporting participants to develop the soft and foundational essential skills, networks and resilience needed to participate in the socio-economy.



## COLLABORATORS' REGIONAL ADAPTATIONS OF THE MODEL

Collaborators drew on their experience and on the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model to design flexibly adapted essential skills programs and curricula for the project while tailoring specific elements of their lesson plans, materials and delivery approaches to their program populations.

All included the core component of the YWCA BSF model—Personal Development & Career Management Services—in their programs.

Some collaborators—YWCAs Agvvik Nunavut, Moncton and Thompson—worked mainly at the foundational building stage of essential skills programming with participants, and drew accordingly on the first two components of the model (Personal Development & Career Management Services and Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training).

Others—in Hamilton, National Capital Region, Saskatoon and Toronto—working with some more job-ready participants, adapted the third BSF component: Job Readiness & Placement Services. Still others—such as in Halifax and Metro Vancouver—worked with a mixed range of participants. They drew on both pre-employment and employment components.

Collaborators from Metro Vancouver, National Capital Region and Saskatoon drew on the model to adapt already well established essential skills programs, whereas those from Agvvik Nunavut, Hamilton, Moncton and Thompson developed new programs based on their experience with previous essential skills programming and also drawing on learning from the YWCA BSF model and asset-based approach.

In the end, nine different adapted program models and curricula have emerged from the project (one from all collaborators and two different program models from YWCA Hamilton), along with many more lesson plans, and practitioner tips. With limited resources for publication, YWCA Toronto's project team selected only a sampling of the most promising of these lesson plans and tips to include in the Toolkit.

Even among the stronger and more experienced programs, sustaining staff and project-based funding issues were major challenges. Halifax and Hamilton faced particular challenges in securing a funded project that could serve as a program for the pilot project research. The resulting delay meant that their programs could not be included in the overall pilot intake reporting or in the overall outcomes explored in the evaluation. However, when they did receive funding, they participated by adapting one or more components of the YWCA BSF model. Their participant numbers are included in the overall program population statistics gathered after November 2016 and reflected in the chart in **Section 4.1.1** on p. 82.

### 3.1 THE REGIONAL PROGRAMS

Below is a profile of each collaborator and their program(s) for the project. See the accompanying Toolkit for a sampling of their curricula, lesson plans and practitioner tips. All program profiles were authored by their respective collaborators and have been edited only for consistency and typographical errors. Since the end of the research in 2018, some of the programs are continuing, while others may have changed or may no longer be offered. The profiles capture them as they were offered during the research period.

*Note: this icon represents elements that collaborators introduced as NEW to program design for this project.*





### 3.1.1 YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT, NUNAVUT—SEWING TO SUCCESS

## Sewing to Success (Qisilirniq—“Working on Sealskin”) Program

**About the Association:** Our YWCA strives to increase the well-being and independence of people, particularly women, through a community-based approach and from an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory framework. The program operates through our women’s shelters.

**Demographic Population:** Inuit women

**Local Context:** Unemployment remains a challenge experienced by many within the Agvvik, Nunavut community. Many are unable to find or maintain employment due to an intersection of barriers experienced within the community. Women continue to struggle with having their basic needs unmet, and many have reported experiences of homelessness, struggles with addictions, and fleeing from violent situations (YWCA Agvvik, 2018). Many women who come to us are in extreme hardship and often financially dependent on their abusers; most are unemployed and remain at home. Some remain in abusive relationships because they feel it is the only way to provide for themselves and their children; their only source of income outside their abuser is their Child Tax Benefit cheque.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:**

To support women in developing job-attaining skills and develop empowerment from financial independence, safeguarding their rights and promoting healthy lifestyle choices.

**Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills**

**Programming:** We offer culturally supportive learning and skills acquisition encouraging women to become entrepreneurs; assist women in shelters to discover

what type of work will help further their goals, and with resume building, job searches, job acquisition and follow up; connect women with existing job and other training supports within the community, and with opportunities to market and sell their products.

**Our Program Adaptations from the YWCA**

**Building Sustainable Futures Model:** Working at the foundational stage with Component 1—Personal Development & Career Management Services—and supporting our participants to access opportunities in the community to sell and promote their products.

#### PROGRAM OUTLINE:

**Learning Pathways:** Sewing skills support self-employment—holistic adult learning model based on Sharing Circle and peer learning/mentorship

**Purpose:** Sewing to Success (Qisilirniq—“Working on Sealskin”) is designed to offer culturally relevant healing while teaching traditional sewing skills, with the aim of supporting women to become more socio-economically independent and improve their sense of Inuit identity and self-confidence.

**Description:** Sewing to Success is a culturally immersed training opportunity for local Inuit women designed to empower them in their lives and prepare them for an entrepreneurial future. It equips them with the business and sewing skills, and the community resources that will enable them to produce and manage their art and craft works on an independent, self-employed basis. We support them to take advantage of an informal micro-economy that already exists in Iqaluit until they can officially start their business. One of our main goals is personal development: for women to gain and maintain the resilience to move forward in their lives through highly challenging circumstances.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

**Engaging Elders to teach essential skills:** Elders helped demonstrate the ways in which culture can be used beyond personal identity. Elders supported the women in turning to their culture as a coping mechanism for stress.

**NEW Engaging community partners to provide job search skills:** We were able to develop a long-term liaison with Arctic College career development. Participants did not need to search for career support, which encouraged them to use our liaison.

**Consistent support from YWCA facilitator and shelter staff:** The facilitator had the very daunting task of supporting the women in developing career goals; while staff supported numerous participants in acquiring housing within a very competitive housing market.

**NEW Provision of culturally relevant personal progress tools:** With the support of YWCA Toronto, we were able to adapt the BSF Project tools to develop a culturally relevant personal- and career-development model. The model facilitated lively discussion among participants and supported them in sorting through their personal problems using a traditional tool.

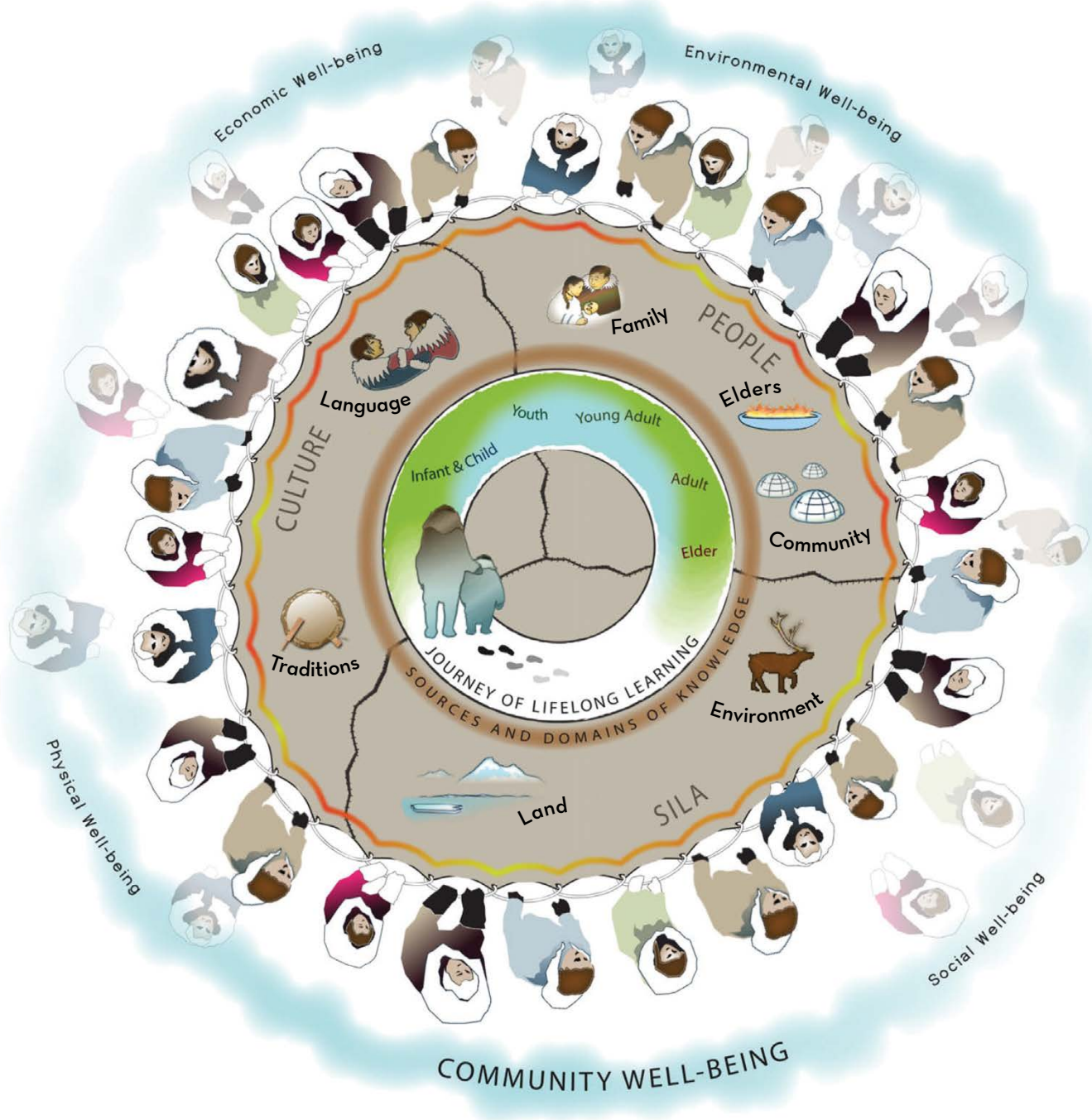
**NEW Discussion-based workshops and group work:** Communication and a sense of community are central to Inuit identity. Discussion facilitated the self-reflective process and provided new perspectives on common issues that participants faced; it helped each woman overcome feelings of isolation.

**NEW Participant/participant mentoring of sewing skills:** For sewing skills sessions, participants became the teachers. We partnered an advanced participant with a novice to teach and pass on the skills being taught by the facilitator. There was a sense of fulfilment when women taught each other, which helped with individual confidence.

**Business development workshops:** Women felt supported in navigating the business and budgeting world. These workshops provided participants with the skills they would need to open and sustain their own businesses. It also connected women with potential clientele.



Figure 11: Canadian Community on Learning. *Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model*. 24 Sept 2007.



## PARTICIPANT STORY, YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT (IQALUIT, NU)



*Jane Doe has shown staggering growth since participating in the Sewing to Success program. Jane comes from a very abusive household where her mother was an alcoholic and her father molested her on numerous occasions. She has a developmental disability and due to this has been unable to live independently; there are few support services that exist in the community for her. As a result, our organization has been supporting her as best as possible.*

*Jane has worked odd jobs to provide for herself, but within the community there is still a lot of stigma attached to developmental disabilities, as few people understand her condition. Jane participated in our program, where we worked to help her develop the skills she would need to make scarves, headbands and hats. Over the course of the program, we have facilitated her in seeking out local opportunities in which she can sell her products. We have worked with her in both the group setting and individually to help her understand how to price her merchandise and how to allocate her money for savings and spending. Jane was able to go on her first self-funded trip to visit a friend in eastern Canada. With the support and coaching of Staff, she was able to take her first-ever solo flight. This was a big step for Jane; coming out of the prolonged abuse that she experienced was really tough for her. However, knowing that she made this trip a reality was truly an empowering moment for her.*

### 3.1.2 YWCA HALIFAX—TWO PROGRAMS: LAUNCH; STEP AHEAD (HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA)

## YWCA Halifax—LAUNCH and Step Ahead

**About the Association:** We are a multi-service organization committed to providing a continuum of programs and services to assist women in removing barriers. We build economic security, promote wellness and create opportunities for women, girls and their families. We offer women-focused programs, and linkage to other services and organizations. We have a proven track record of delivering high-quality programming based on national best practices.

**Demographic Population:** Low-income women and youth.

**Our Local Context:** Our YWCA is centrally located in the community of Spryfield, which has an extremely high percentage of residents living on Income Assistance, one of the highest rates of single/lone

mothers in the country and a low rate of high school graduates. Employability programming is currently being held at this location; the space and resources available at this location are accessible to the surrounding communities.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** To learn more about integrated essential skills delivery and about a strength-based approach to ESE programming, in order to enhance our program delivery.

**Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills Programming:** LAUNCH Internship and Step Ahead programs create opportunities for positive support networks through facilitating peer learning, mentor relationships, work placement supervision, and connections to other community organizations and resources. We have supported participants to visit local organizations and become familiar with the services offered, and to provide the best training available in the community. Job Junction hosted training sessions in Microsoft Office; we have also supported participants to organize informational interviews with employers/businesses in their areas of interest, to discover the talents they already possess, and to develop additional skills and learning.



## Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building

### Sustainable Futures Model:

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services

## YWCA HALIFAX EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS OUTLINE (LAUNCH AND STEP AHEAD)

### Learning Pathways: 1) Essential Skills and Employability Skills Training; 2) Career Exploration; 3) Employer Engagement; 4) Work Experience

**Purpose:** To support women in moving toward economic independence through pre-employment training and direct employment experience. The LAUNCH and Step Ahead programs incorporate skill building and employment readiness training for young women and women of all ages receiving income assistance, respectively. Participants also include women with disabilities, Indigenous women, immigrants and African Nova Scotian women. Participants experience multiple barriers to employment including lack of childcare, transportation, food insecurity, criminal records, poverty, ageism, domestic violence, lack of education/training, low self-confidence, limited/no work experience and limited support networks.

**Description:** YWCA Halifax has a long history delivering employability and training programs for women. LAUNCH's first pilot was completed in 2006. LAUNCH engages young women aged 15-30 who are receiving income assistance or are unemployed or under employed in a 24-week program. It consists of a seven-week group-based employability skills training workshop and ends in a 17-week work experience placement with an employer in a field of each participant's interest. Step Ahead, which began in 2013 and was modelled after LAUNCH, engages women of all ages who are currently in receipt of income assistance in an 18-week program (five-week group-based workshops, 11-week work experience, one-week group-based workshop transition). Both programs are strengths based, women centred and flexible, as program content and format are adapted based on the needs of participants.

In 2015, YWCA Halifax joined the project to share its best and promising practices as well as to learn from other collaborators running employment programs across the country. The Sustainable Livelihoods approach was incorporated into our model in the fall of 2015 with considerable success. The asset mapping tool has been an effective way for participants to visualize their assets, set goals and reflect on positive changes they experience throughout the program.



## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

**NEW** **SL asset mapping:** Participants completed three asset maps and had opportunities to reflect and discuss their assets throughout group-based training workshops. Knowing assets was particularly effective for workshops on self-awareness, personal values and goal setting. At the end of the group-based workshops the participants discussed their new asset map scores and reflected on the changes over the course of the program. The mapping provided a valuable tool to assess changes in finances and well-being.

**1:1 Coaching minutes:** Increased focus on and tracking of coaching minutes to support participants with complex needs.

**NEW** **Soft skills (youth focus):** While both programs focused on all essential skills, our youth employment program (LAUNCH) also focused strongly on building soft skills (such as thinking, working with others, oral communication and continuous learning) as many participants were new to the work force and were interested in learning how to conduct themselves in the workplace. Some examples of soft skills-focused workshops included workshops on professionalism, personalities and effective communication skills on the phone. An enhancement in this area included overlapping employer engagement with soft skills-building for participants. Professionals from our advisory council delivered workshops and mock interviews that focused on soft skills, based on participant needs.

**Experiential learning:** Both programs had a high focus on hands-on opportunities for learning, which was particularly invaluable for youth or other participants with little-to-no work experience. This included small group discussions on case studies, role playing and games within workshops, mock interviews, one-day volunteer placements and work experience placements.

## PARTICIPANT STORY, YWCA HALIFAX (HALIFAX, NS)

*"I have learned so much since attending the LAUNCH Program. I became more confident in myself and my self-esteem has become much stronger. I have learned a lot about my strengths, weaknesses and also about my goals. When I started the internship, I thought my career would be in child care, but as I started working in a day care I realized that it wasn't what I wanted to do. So now I am in a library working and I am extremely happy here. Thanks to the LAUNCH Program, I am now applying for my high school diploma in 2017, and I am also looking into my Librarian Assistant Course. I have become a better person, and I will take everything I have learned with me into the future. I also recommend the program to all women looking to better their future, or to get it started. Thank you for helping me figure out my future career and also helping me to become the person I am today."*

**YWCA HALIFAX** participant

### 3.1.3 YWCA HAMILTON—TWO PROGRAMS: Pre-Apprenticeship General Machinist and Industrial Mechanic (Millwright) Training for Women; Women’s Entrepreneurship Program (Hamilton, Ontario)

## YWCA Hamilton— Pre-Apprenticeship for Women & Women’s Entrepreneurship

**About the Association:** We are a community-based organization assisting economically disadvantaged, marginalized, and diverse groups and individuals. Our services facilitate participation, access and equal opportunities, including support, training, assistance and advocacy. Our core services are: transitional housing, employment supports, licensed child care centres, special programs for women and girls, leadership development for women and youth, developmental services, group homes, active living centres, newcomer settlement, and health and wellness.

**Demographic Group:** Immigrant women and youth.

**Our Local Context:** There is a high rate of low-income households and homelessness in the community. Women rely more heavily on government transfers, and more heads of households in social housing are women. Many of our participants are struggling to deal with challenges in their lives, and with low self-esteem and motivation.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** To continue to promote safe, inclusive and equitable communities; to build capacity to provide information, resources and support to “like-minded” organizations in a variety of communities; and to enhance services and supports within our community.

#### **Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills**

**Programming:** We are an experienced organization with skilled and able staff. Our employment-specific expertise includes: Employment Access and

Assistance: drop-in resource centre, skills training including Smart Serve and Safe Food Handling and employment advisement; Bridging Programs: assist Internationally Trained Professionals to upgrade skills and access employment.

Outcomes include: participants employed in areas commensurate with education and previous experience; participants pursuing additional education to increase their employability; participants pursuing self-employment. We have seen our participants increase in self-confidence, job readiness and job-retention skills.

#### **Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:**

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training

#### **Our Programs:**

YWCA Hamilton had originally planned to deliver a pre-employment program for young multi-barriered women, but when funding was seriously delayed, we made a strategic decision to focus instead on two separate sectoral programs: Pre-Apprenticeship General Machinist and Industrial Mechanic (Millwright) Training for Women, and a Women’s Entrepreneurship Program.

The Pre-Apprenticeship program (28 weeks) leads to a Level 1 trade certification from Mohawk College followed by eight weeks of job placement. Supports include in-class training about working in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Staff noted a high local demand for skilled and qualified people in this sector, which pays well as compared to many other entry-level jobs; they anticipated all successful graduates from the program would be able to secure quality employment.

The self-employment program centres on small business development and offers women a business coach, training to design and implement a business plan, support to access grants and other lending resources, and mentoring. Women in this program started a variety of businesses including: baking, jewellery making, body care products, web design, social media marketing, art, meditation, etc.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS

**NEW** **Implementing the Sustainable Livelihoods tools:** Helped participants and staff visualize where strengths and areas for improvement were; showed how change (mostly positive) was achieved over time in a simple way.

**1:1 Coaching with Participants:** Addressed complicated barriers in a sensitive and customized way. The program was client-centred and provided an enhanced and valuable opportunity to share freely.

**Meeting the demographic through customized content delivery:** We have always allowed clients to progress at their own pace, for example by offering self-directed tools for participants who work at a faster pace. In terms of demographic sensitivity, we have addressed an observed generational divide regarding technology challenges among mature job seekers; extra help is available to them as needed. Further flexibility is built in to respond to clients' needs; for example, staff are attentive to personal situations, reasons to discontinue the program if it is not suitable for the participant, and can make accommodations to allow participants to learn from home.

**Mentoring:** We have a network of small business owners who have a desire to help new businesses begin. Program participants who have completed an approved business plan are matched with a female mentor who can provide advice, support and experience in the challenges and struggles of starting a business.



### PARTICIPANT STORY, YWCA HAMILTON (HAMILTON, ON)

*“I’m writing this letter to express my gratitude for this program; it has truly changed my life in a major way. I am not only more knowledgeable but also confident in my business than I have ever been. This program is exactly what I’ve been praying for. The exact guide my business needed. I’m now able to move forward with my business having a clear view and plan, giving me hope in building a great future for my children. I’m forever grateful, thank you for this once in a life time opportunity.”*

**YWCA HAMILTON** participant

3

### 3.1.4 YWCA METRO VANCOUVER— FOCUS@WORK (VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA)

## YWCA Metro Vancouver— Focus@Work

**About the Association:** We aim to touch lives and build better futures for women and their families through advocacy and integrated services fostering economic independence, wellness and equal opportunities. We recognize the importance of Essential Skills programming and how it relates to achieving our mission.

**Demographic Population:** Mature and immigrant women.

**Our Local Context:** We work with a large immigrant population. In Vancouver, there are high rates of homelessness and substance use, and a high cost of living and scarcity of housing, let alone affordable housing.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** Like YWCA Toronto, we also integrate essential skills into all of our Employment Services programming, though we do not facilitate a stand-alone Essential Skills program. We wanted to be better positioned to develop more specific essential skills workshops to deliver to clients across employment, youth, mentorship and single mothers' programs.

#### **Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills**

**Programming:** YWCA Metro Employment Services employs Case Managers and Employment Counsellors who are certified Essential Skills facilitators. They integrate Essential Skills into all supports and programming provided to clients. The FOCUS@Work program helps women assess their skills and strengths, set career goals and develop job search skills to obtain meaningful employment. We offer full-time, directed, group-based programming.

#### **Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:**

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services

#### **PROGRAM OUTLINE:**

**Learning Pathways:** 1) Group Workshop; 2) One-to-one coaching; 3) Peer group development and networking

**Purpose:** The aim of FOCUS@Work is to help women achieve economic and employment sustainability. We serve all project demographic groups; the program is for women who are work ready or are in career transition. Many have been out of the workplace for a while, e.g. for family reasons, or have suffered shocks, or are “stuck” and have lost motivation; they often experience low self-esteem and confidence. Between 2014 and May 2016, we served over 217 clients.

**Description:** FOCUS@Work is a recognized employment program that equips women with the skills to promote themselves to employers, learn about suitable work environments and careers, and gain confidence in building their personal and professional network. New program sessions start every five weeks with the aim of delivering ten programs to serve 100 clients in each program year.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

**NEW** **My Plan /Asset Maps:** The tools and process for clients to reflect on their assets (My Plan/ Asset Maps), were built into the existing curriculum. Clients were introduced to Sustainable Livelihoods and completed three Asset Maps. Clients increased self-awareness of their assets and how these had shifted, resulting in increased self-confidence. One-to-one coaching using the tools has allowed staff to support clients in a holistic way. We have always worked with clients in a holistic manner, but the maps gave staff a tangible tool to engage in coaching conversations that provided self-assessment and self-awareness in order for clients to create a solid plan to build their capacity and move them toward their goals.

**Client-centred coaching:** Coaching provides clients with the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to problems, generate ideas, try new ways of doing things and have someone to debrief with in a nonjudgmental way. This approach helps clients build self-confidence and independence. Over the 12 weeks we notice clients become increasingly independent and self-directed. Clients who have been in the program for a longer period provide support and mentorship to the newer clients.

**NEW** **Streamlined service:** Based on client feedback and staff observations, we have recently increased client engagement by assigning each client to a dedicated Career Advisor, resulting in continuity of service for the client, increased efficiencies for staff and better outcome tracking. Feedback from clients has been overwhelmingly positive.

**Early group delivery:** Phase 1 of program was delivered in a group setting to reduce social isolation. Prior to participating in the program, most if not all of our clients had been conducting their job search in isolation. Being part of FOCUS@Work provided them with the opportunity to have peer support and expand their peer network. Most of our workshops have large and small group activities, so clients have an opportunity to practice and build their team skills.

Additionally, the clients report back to the group their reflections and responses to exercises, resulting in increased self-confidence and communication skills. The group component helps English as a Second Language (ESL) clients to gain self-confidence and stronger English language skills.

**Phase 2 Success Team:** After clients have completed the three weeks of job search training, they move into Phase 2, which is Active Job Search. After the very structured three weeks of workshops, moving into the self-directed component can be a big transition. In some cases, clients regress back into isolation. Success Team is a group coaching activity every Monday morning, an opportunity for cross-cohort connection (at any given time, we can have three-plus cohorts actively seeking employment) and for clients to stay connected as a group. Clients share their plan for the week, and it's an opportunity for them to brainstorm, generate ideas and get peer support. Clients share information and resources, resulting in reduced social isolation and improved well-being.

**Guest speakers and events:** Clients gain networking opportunities, practice networking pitches, gain labour market information, and make workplace connections. We celebrate success at our events, e.g. at our summer garden party we had over 65 guests and some were from our very first cohort!

**NEW** **Electronic tools:** Implementation of Slack, an online platform for team communication. Slack allows clients to communicate with each other, and across cohorts. It provides staff with the ability to communicate efficiently with clients, and acts as a one-stop shop for workshop materials (reducing the amount of paper), job leads, office communications, interesting articles, and inspiring and fun things to share. Aside from some staff channels (reporting, etc.), which are confidential, Slack is client driven. It has increased staff efficiency and has significantly increased program engagement.



## AMBER'S STORY, YWCA METRO VANCOUVER (VANCOUVER, BC)

As a single parent with the prospect of a new dependent, Amber was apprehensive about the struggle to find work with sustainable income for her whole family. She was able to get comprehensive support and resources that filled in many gaps in her past employment programs. From finding out more about her own skills and background to outlining her values and matching them to environments conducive to her success, Amber's experience brought her to a successful job placement.



In her own words:

*“As a single parent, I knew since my pregnancy that I would struggle to find work that would be a sustainable income viable for a dependant. FOCUS@Work offered me comprehensive support and resources/tools that filled in many gaps that other employment programs missed. This program began at the 101 fundamentals of who I am, what I value and what environments cultivate my success, and took me step by step through to the 401 of successful job placement.*

*I was surprised how supported and encouraged I felt just by attending each day—the empowering environment each staff cultivated daily. I realized how much I was able to accomplish being at FOCUS, how solid and encouraging my perspective stayed having others around to share day to day job-searching experiences and insights, including what was learned from one-to-one coaching with the facilitators. I learned how empowered and confident I feel in a collaborative and team environment. I learned how to take more “happy ownership” of my unique traits, skills and values. I learned practical, self-awareness strategies to help me strengthen and compensate for personal traits less developed.*

*FOCUS@Work has empowered my confidence and boosted my skills! I have a better understanding of myself as a person and also as a professional, and therefore can now effectively find and apply for jobs that better cultivate success for both me and my employer. I have gained better insight into how to find and target true and sustainable success in my career, and what I believe to be comprehensive support in job search, helping me to bridge gaps.”*

### 3.1.5 YWCA MONCTON—WOMEN ON THE MOVE (SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK)

## YWCA Moncton— Women on the Move

**About the Association:** We support and empower women—and their families—through advocacy and integrated services that foster independence, wellness and equity for all. Our vision is of empowered women leading inspired lives: personal empowerment is a key area of focus; this includes support to achieve economic and personal milestones relating to employment and life skills. As a growing organization experiencing a period of renewal, we have had to contend with a number of challenges. Drawing on community partnerships and the broader YWCA movement, as well as our commitment to a client-centred approach, has consistently ensured that challenges become learning opportunities.

**Demographic Population:** Mature women and youth.

**Our Local Context:** Part of our work within the Beechwood community consists of community meetings and soliciting input on programming from community members. We take note of what the members identify as systemic issues: for example, we recently obtained funding from TD Bank/Prosper Canada to develop a financial literacy program tailored to the needs of women accessing public income supports.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** This project complements our existing approach and contributes to strategic growth. We also want to pursue our current planning stage of a new facility offering programs and services with a strong focus on women's economic security—particularly on breaking cycles of poverty. We want to build capacity for our facility that will be home to vocational assessments, Life Skills and employment readiness classes, job skills development and training, and job search assistance. We also are interested in building our expertise in employment programs and services, and strategic growth for our new facility.

**Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills Programming:** We have developed Women on the Move at our Moncton location: a six-week pre-employment program designed to promote employment-related goal setting. The program used the Life Skills model, integrated volunteerism, and offered financial literacy training. Topics included personal employment goal setting, understanding the labour market, preparing to enter the workforce, making career choices, preparing for interviews, writing résumés and cover letters, building portfolios, conducting job searches and employment maintenance.

#### **Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:**

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Leadership & Business Services

## PROGRAM OUTLINE:

**Learning Pathways:** 1) Participant-centred meeting women “where they are”; 2) Problem solving and navigating systems and access to services; 3) Community-building and peer-based support

**Purpose:** This self-development program aims to support women to gain skills that will better prepare them for the work environment, as well as specific work-related skills needed for entry-level positions or to advance from entry-level work. It is a women-only program. Many of the women face barriers to employment such as: poverty (often intergenerational); trauma; life crises; absences from the workforce; lack of essential skills training in literacy, numeracy, computer use and problem-solving; and low confidence and self-esteem.

**Description:** The result of a partnership of two YWCA organizations in New Brunswick, this new version of Women on the Move was developed for women in Saint John based on feedback and results from a prior program that ran in Moncton for approximately one year. The current program offers training to women from across the city, with the majority coming from Saint John’s “priority neighbourhoods.”

Referrals come largely from other non-profits. The program selects women who have made attempts to become self-reliant and gain employment but need more training and support to overcome the challenging barriers that they have experienced.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

All components are new to the Saint John program, which is itself new:

**NEW** **1:1 Coaching and Support:** We meet women “where they are,” to listen to their needs, help them talk through and strategize about their life issues, and support them to navigate complex systems in order to access services. Aside from appointments, we’re also available before and after class; sometimes issues are triggered by the content in class, but they want to discuss them one to one with us.

**NEW** **Integrating the Social Wheel:** We know that as participants begin to change their lives, their social circle plays an important role in either propelling them forward or holding them back. Completing the social wheel allows time for reflection about how others are influencing their self-concept and self-growth.

**NEW** **Common Sen\$e—Our Financial Literacy Toolkit:** Our financial literacy tools are specifically designed for the realities of women living in poverty. Different components are incorporated throughout the program, and address values toward work, beliefs about money and spending habits that can keep women from getting ahead.

**NEW** **Peer Support:** Both cohorts emphasized in their feedback the importance of the group, and the collaborative and supportive classroom environment. They help each other problem solve, stay motivated and cheerlead for one another. Responding to the specific needs of the group, as they become apparent, not only gives women a sense of ownership over the program but also makes the biggest impact. If they’re worried about Christmas (because of money, past traumas, etc.), then that becomes our starting place, and we can use that in our examples and come out of class with real solutions and resources. If we discover they don’t have goals, we have a class on dreams and create tools to get them thinking about things they want for themselves, but may have long forgotten. This keeps the material relevant to their lives.



**Guest Speakers:** Carefully selected guest speakers provide inspiration and the lived experience of moving along the Sustainable Livelihoods continuum. We had entrepreneurs, community leaders and a woman in a male-dominated profession. The women can identify with them, drawing hope, motivation and real solutions from their stories.



**Matched Savings:** Due to our partnership with the SJ Community Loan Fund, women were able to contribute funds to a matched savings program, where money they deposited was matched three to one! Some used this money for training and some for laptops or other items to help them with their job search or self-employment. The women really liked this!



**Partnerships:** Partnerships we made with organizations like the SJ Community Loan Fund and the food bank meant we were able to respond to women’s needs with a variety of resources and services.

**ANDRIENNE’S STORY, YWCA MONCTON (MONCTON, NB)**

*Andrienne is 20 years old and a single mother of an infant son. She had little work experience but wanted to connect with other women and build her skills to gain employment. When she joined the program, she had recently been released from prison and was taking part in a methadone program. Although classes were challenging for her, she was committed to building a future for herself. Over the course of the program, Andrienne was also struggling with parenting skills. She was able to build these skills, reduce her methadone intake, make additional connections in the community and express her desire to enter the trades. She credits the support she received from YWCA in helping her to overcome her challenges and to be reunited with her son. She is planning on moving from her parole housing placement, has been budgeting monthly, and is taking additional parenting and personal development classes as well as looking into options around returning to college for the trades. She is well on her way! Although for Andrienne employment is some time away, she has built her five asset areas and in doing so has been able to make a plan for herself and her son.*





### 3.1.6 YMCA-YWCA NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION—POWER OF TRADES/PUISSANCE DES MÉTIERS (ONTARIO)

## YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region—Power of Trades/Puissance des Métiers

**About the Association:** YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region (YNCR) delivers a variety of employment, enterprise and newcomer services in both official languages. We are committed to helping people reach their full potential. Our employment programs are designed to enhance the skills of youth and adults. Through programs such as Employment Ontario Employment Services (EOES) and Power of Trades (PT), we offer a range of resources and supports.

**Demographic Population:** New immigrants.

**Our Local Context:** YNCR delivers various programming to meet the needs of the community: employment and social services to assist youth at risk, immigrants, peoples with disabilities and other economically disadvantaged persons. We see many challenges related to immigration settlement and economic integration issues.

#### **Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:**

To increase the essential skills and address the barriers that exclude anglophone and francophone unemployed or underemployed from employment success and integration into the workforce; to leverage current resources and knowledge, and contribute to the development of a collaborative Essential Skills delivery model; and to enhance our current employment program delivery model and provide additional resources to multi-barriered individuals.

#### **Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills**

**Programming:** YNCR delivers various employment and social services to assist youth at risk, immigrants, peoples with disabilities and other economically disadvantaged persons. Funded by IRCC/United Way, Power of Trades is a bridge training program delivered to immigrants and newcomers. Our outcomes include high levels of employment (60%) and pursuing trades training (20%).

#### **Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:**

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services

#### **PROGRAM OUTLINE:**

**Learning Pathways:** 1) Sectoral employment focus; 2) Client-centred program; 3) Preparing participants for the Canadian workplace

**Purpose:** This sector-specific program aims to equip Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs), including immigrants residing in the Ottawa area, with the necessary skills to secure employment in skilled trades. The program for this project focused on working with recent anglophone and francophone immigrants.

**Description:** Power of Trades was developed in response to a lack of skilled trades people in Ontario and the increased need to fill these gaps in coming years. There is also a need in the community to help immigrants and ITIs navigate the pathway to trades in Ontario/Canada. Offered in both English and French, the program is delivered in group sessions over a six-week period, and provides a combination of job search and essential skills training. At the completion of each training cohort, post-program supports include job search, three-week co-op placements and job placements. Staff members improve program components based on their own observations and participant feedback while also maintaining regular contact with all participants through case management in order to provide ongoing support and to document outcomes.



## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

**The Essential Skills Showdown:** an overview of essential skills required for their chosen trades; an opportunity to test skills in a hands-on group activity, to confirm that their career is a good match; and the chance to reconsider or identify areas for improvement and provide resources to enhance skills.

**NEW Motivation at Work:** a workshop that supports clients to explore their values and what motivates them at work, to help them choose a career accordingly.

**Weekly Goal Setting:** allows clients to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) goals for the upcoming week, and to reflect back on their weekly achievements and readjust their goals as they progress in the program.

**NEW Cultural Adaptation and Culture Shock & Canadian Workplace Culture:** addresses the concept of culture, culture shock, and what is expected in the Canadian Workplace—touches on many essential skills, including communication skills, team work and numeracy.

**Financial Literacy Workshop:** allows clients to reflect on the kind of relationship they have with money and offers resources available in the community to gain financial literacy.

**Personality Dimensions Workshop:** self-assessment of their personality preferences/temperament; several tests used to identify your strengths, understand how to work in a team and how to influence others positively in the workplace.

**NEW Action Learning Activity:** performed with the whole Power of Trades staff team and the clients; encourages them to ask for help from their colleagues, express their preferences and learn the importance of team work and trust.

## ERICKSON'S STORY, YMCA-YWCA NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

**“He was nicknamed ‘the CEO’ by the other students for his ability to dream big.”**

*Erickson Ramirez immigrated to Canada from the Dominican Republic with a bachelor’s degree in Electromechanical Engineering and a certificate as an Industrial Electrician. Despite his qualifications, he could not find a job in his field in Canada. He decided to enrol in the Power of Trades program for pre-employment training. His enthusiasm and positive energy were noticed right away along with his ability to support the other students in the program. During his Power of Trades adventure, he expressed on numerous occasions his interest to work in the electrical field and also in business. He was nicknamed “the CEO” by the other students for his ability to dream big.*

*The Power of Trades Job Developer contacted an employer that was a perfect fit for Erickson. The company—Lightenco, LED Lighting Systems—is a local and awards-winning company that has experienced growth in the Eco-Friendly LED sector around the world. Erickson got his first interview with one of the owners of the company. He was quick to demonstrate that he was ready to start using all the skills learned during the Power of Trades session. With much success, Erickson was given a second interview via Skype. The second interview was with the other owner of the company. Erickson successfully passed the second stage of interviews and started working with Lightenco the following week!*



### 3.1.7 YWCA SASKATOON—ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT IN HOSPITALITY (SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN)

## YWCA Saskatoon—Essential Skills for Employment in Hospitality

**About the Association:** Our mission is “working to eliminate poverty, homelessness and violence for women and their families and the core strategy under Programming is to take a pro-active approach to preventative programming.” We desire to empower and equip women and men to make long-lasting changes in their lives. Our employment programs have been an integral part of our program offerings: we offer a continuum of programs, from emergent services (emergency shelter) to basic life skills and various targeted programs to assist clients in obtaining long-term sustainable employment.

**Demographic Population:** Indigenous, immigrant, mature, and youth.

**Our Local Context:** Saskatchewan currently has the lowest rates of unemployment in Canada, and Saskatoon has the second-lowest unemployment rate of all Canadian cities. Certain groups struggle inordinately to find and sustain employment, in particular Indigenous people, often due to essential skills gaps. The urban Indigenous population is significant at 9.8% of our population, and in Saskatchewan Indigenous unemployment rates are upwards of five times higher than the general population. *Issues and Trends Impacting the City of Saskatoon 2013-2014* indicates that over 6,000 newcomers have settled in the Saskatoon region in the last two years.

#### **Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:**

The project fits into our Employment and Learning framework; we also wanted to share and learn from other collaborator curricula, other resources and promising practices.

#### **Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills**

**Programming:** We have developed expertise in working with clients who need to increase essential skills; built a reputation as an organization with expertise in offering programs and supports, equipping clients with the skills and confidence to be successful in obtaining and sustaining employment. We provide employment services funded for the most part through the provincial government: Job Search Program (JSP), Employment Services for Clients (ESP) and Learn, Explore, Achieve, and Plan (LEAP).

#### **Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:**

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services
4. Professional Development Services

## PROGRAM OUTLINE:

**Learning Pathways:** 1) Group Development and Peer Learning; 2) Client-focused curriculum; 3) Sectoral programming in the Hospitality Industry

**Purpose:** This free sector-specific program is designed to prepare participants to succeed in gaining, maintaining and advancing in employment within the hospitality services industry. Essential Skills for Employment in Hospitality works with a wide range of underserved participants who are ready for and seeking employment in the hospitality sector. There has been a high level of participation from the Indigenous community.

**Description:** Essential Skills for Employment in Hospitality is an eight-week sector-specific pre-employment program for participants interested in work within Saskatchewan’s growing hospitality industry. The training focuses on lifelong essential skills learning, and aims to build the confidence, motivation and workplace literacy of unemployed/underemployed job seekers interested in this sector. After training, participants are provided with a three-week part-time or full-time unpaid work placement in the hospitality industry to gain hands-on knowledge and experience. Staff follow up with each participant over six months after program delivery to determine if they were able to find employment. Job maintenance support is available to those who have secured employment, and continued job search support is available to those who are still pursuing opportunities.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:



**Building group using a structured format:** Building group consensus and safety within the group supported opportunities for participants to learn and share the “richness” of their experiences (e.g. previous work experience) and knowledge (e.g. community resources that can meet a particular need such as clothing, computer access, mental health, housing, child care). This program tested the notion of the importance of group building and the level of facilitator’s abilities, and their relationship to increasing participant successes. (Note: the idea was an evaluation recommendation from another project—our Trade Journey pilot project.) The facilitator for groups two–four implemented a structured approach to building group (e.g. setting group guidelines), which he acquired thanks to a chance opportunity to complete YWCA Toronto’s Life Skills Coach Phase 1. This element has demonstrated outcomes such as participants that stay in contact after the program and positive feedback on learning.



**Lesson Plans:** Implementing the lesson plan format (also learned from the Life Skills Coach Phase 1) supported creating a well-rounded program for increased essential employment skills for the purpose of meeting participants “where they were”; enhanced the employability on the Sustainable Livelihoods continuum and provided a lesson plan that can be used in the future. We had lots of positive participant feedback to support that we were on the right track, which informed quality improvement changes between each cohort and resulted in continual quality improvement program materials and workshops.

**Employment engagement:** We have had a long-term commitment to employer engagement, which is built into our program model. However, through this project we have made new enhancements.

We formalized our employer engagement processes and tools, by:

- showing how the relationship was built (e.g. workplace tours);
- creating a collaborative approach to matching participants and employers with facilitator guidance, and incentivizing participation by giving participants with highest attendance choice of work placement location;
- developing a good set of documents to guide the process and help employers make it a good experience;
- investing time needed for the process that allowed employers to review resumes, do interviews and select participants, etc.; and
- partnering with our Job Search Program for tours.

**Networking in the hospitality sector:** We developed this network starting with existing relationships, and it then grew through new partnerships with hotels new to Saskatoon and established hotels that we had not worked with prior to this BSF project. These relationships will be ongoing and have become part of our Employment Services programming.

**Accessing the YWCA’s holistic services:** We also drew on our internal capacity to provide more holistic supports for participants (e.g. access to fitness facilities at our gym).

## WINETTE’S STORY, YWCA SASKATOON (SASKATOON, SK)



*When Winette started the ESE program, she was a newcomer who had relocated to Canada along with her family in early 2015. Her employment goal*

*was to find success in a stable job at the same time as studying. Winette, who is hard-working, enthusiastic and quick to adapt completed the group activities around topics such as building a resume, drafting cover letters, job searching online, interviewing, customer service, personal branding and budgeting. Based on an individual learning plan, Winette continued to learn through online training recognized by the hospitality industry, where she received a Service Best certificate and completed an emerit Tourism Training course. Her network increased through the group activities, work place tours and connections to community resources. With increased confidence and sense of comfort in her skills related to the Canadian workplace, Winette completed a three-week work placement at a local hotel. Through her work placement, within a month she had earned the opportunity for a “first call” when the employer had a part-time vacancy.*

*Six months after completing the program, Winette continued to work part-time, entered into further education and volunteered here at YWCA Saskatoon’s Crisis Shelter and Residence.*

*Update Spring 2017: Twelve months later, Winette has continued to work part-time in hospitality. Over the past year, her employer has made accommodations for Winette’s busy schedule of school, work practicum and volunteering. In December 2016, Winette proudly graduated from the Personal Care Aide program and secured casual employment through her work practicum employer, which offers a higher wage of \$21 per hour. Future job opportunities within the health care industry are promising. As her busy schedule permits, Winette still makes time to volunteer here at YWCA Saskatoon’s Crisis Shelter and Residence.*

### 3.1.8 YWCA THOMPSON—STEPS TO SUCCESS (THOMPSON, MANITOBA)

## YWCA Thompson—Steps to Success

**About the Association:** In 2014, the YWCA Thompson mandate and strategic plan were revamped, with the focus no longer being on community building and education and instead on a return to building equality for women and girls.

**Demographic Population:** Predominantly Indigenous men and women; also mature and youth.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** The project fits in with programming we have provided since 2006.

**Our Local Context:** Most people we work with in Steps to Success program face multiple barriers within their lives. Many have been affected by the impacts of the Residential School system, and carry a burden of distrust toward the education system. Within Indigenous communities in Northern Manitoba, schools have been underfunded and qualified teachers are rare. The majority of people who manage to graduate have a Grade 12 diploma but a Grade 4 reading ability. Among the mature workers, the essential skill most commonly needed is Computer Use. Among the immigrants, the essential skill most commonly needed is Oral Communication. Among the youth, the essential skill most commonly needed is Working with Others. Among the Indigenous clients, the essential skills most commonly needed are Reading, Document Use, Writing and Numeracy. The largest challenge we face is to rebuild the clients' belief in themselves.

#### Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills

**Programming:** We sponsor the Employment Links initiative, which is comprised of two programs: Steps to Success program provides adult literacy and workplace essential skills training, and our Assessment

Centre provides academic assessments and career counselling. The majority of the program's clients are Indigenous Peoples from northern communities and who are undereducated and/or lacking job skills. Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC) provides job specific training (front desk agent, line cook, sales associate, food and beverage server, or housekeeping room attendant). Participants receive other certification, such as WHMIS, Food Safe and First Aid.

#### Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services

#### PROGRAM OUTLINE:

**Learning Pathways:** 1) Cultural programming/peer learning; 2) Self-esteem building; 3) Anchor relationship with instructor—open-ended support even after program end

**Purpose:** The program aims to remedy essential skills gaps and help clients develop professional portfolio pieces in order to excel at a job shadowing experience and secure work. The final outcome of securing employment after six months of program participation is the ideal goal.

**Description:** This four-week pre-employment program focuses on developing workplace essential skills and attitudes, preparing people for the workplace. Portfolio building is an important element used to help clients learn new skills or learn to recognize prior skills that they record on sheets, which become the building blocks of their skills-based resumes. After the classroom component, the plan was for clients to connect with cooperating businesses for a two-week job-shadowing position. At the end of job shadowing, the clients would be expected to apply for available jobs.



## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS:

**NEW** **Sharing/Talking Circle:** creates support network/answers and solutions/increases listening and verbal communication skills.

**Certification Training:** First Aid/CPR; WHMIS/Safe Food Handling—highly valued by staff and clients; reinforces group learning when done together.

**Guest Speakers:** bring resources into classrooms and students' comfort zones, meetings with potential employers in informal settings, motivational links to continuous learning and other training opportunities.

**NEW** **Field Trips:** attendance and volunteering at community events; AGMs and open houses; work experience gained, and students are able to practice skills learned in class.

**NEW** **Self-esteem building techniques:** daily practice—students are inspired and recognize that they have resources within themselves.

**One-to-One Instruction:** to address individual needs/concerns.

**NEW** **Cultural Component:** students are invited to participate in First Nations ceremonies.

## JULES' STORY, YWCA THOMPSON (THOMPSON, MB)

*Jules is a mature Indigenous person who has lived at a transitional house for recovering addicts/*

*alcoholics for the last three years. Prior to attending the program, he created and sold First Nations jewellery to make ends meet. Jules has low literacy skills, but has dreams of upgrading those skills and attending university one day.*



*He underwent hip replacement surgery and is slowly recovering. Despite that, he attended almost every day of the program and participated fully in all the activities. He only missed two days, to work for Elections Canada. Jules was popular among the other students and always expressed his appreciation of the support he felt from them. Following the program, Jules was encouraged to apply for work with Manitoba Hydro at KIASK, a major construction project. He is now employed full time and is earning a higher wage than he ever expected. He attributes his success to the skills and support he received through our program.*

### 3.1.9 YWCA TORONTO—ADMINISTRATIVE CLERK CERTIFICATE PROGRAM, EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTE (TORONTO, ONTARIO)

## YWCA Toronto— Administrative Clerk Certificate Program

**About the Association:** Since 1873, we have been dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls. We help women and girls flee violence, secure housing, find jobs, establish their voices, enhance skills and develop confidence. We offer a range of housing options, employment and training programs, community support programs, girls' programs and family programs; we also engage in systemic advocacy. See **Section 1** for more detail.

**Demographic Population:** predominantly low-income women, mature women, new immigrants and young women.

**Our Local Context:** We are a front-line witness to the demand in our communities for gender-focused essential skills training programs: we are acutely aware of the growing number of women, youth and mature workers who are being left behind by a highly competitive labour market. YWCA Toronto's employment centres support thousands of job seekers every year to move toward sustainable futures.

**Why We Joined the National Project Collaborative:** YWCA Toronto was the lead Association for the project and has extensive essential skills training experience to share with other organizations. Of our over 12 employment and training programs, we selected only one to document as a pilot for this project: our Administrative Clerk Certificate training program offered through YWCA Toronto's Education and Training Institute (ETI).

**Our Previous Experience in Essential Skills Programming:** See Section 1.

### Our Adaptations from the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model:

1. Personal Development & Career Management Services
2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training
3. Job Readiness & Placement Services
4. Professional Development Services
5. Leadership & Business Services

### PROGRAM OUTLINE

**Learning Pathways:** 1. Personal Development & Career Management Services; 2. Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training; 3. Job Readiness & Placement Services; 4. Professional Development Services; 5. Leadership & Business Services.

**Purpose:** To prepare and certify women for a career in the administrative and business sectors. The program focuses on developing the skills needed for working in a business environment.

**Description:** The Administrative Clerk Certificate program responds to the need for high-quality, current and affordable vocational programs for women. This certified training is offered through the YWCA ETI, YWCA Toronto's private career college. The YWCA Administrative Clerk Certificate program is an in-class, instructor-led program consisting of 11 weeks of core training for those interested in pursuing a career in the field of Office Administration. The program includes both core and optional pathways.

The curriculum includes: Career Assessment, Essential Business Skills, Essential MSOffice Computer Skills, Keyboarding, Business Math, Customer Service and Employability Skills. In addition, participants are supported through an optional structured one-week job search workshop series and/or placements. They are provided with one-to-one job development support, mentoring and coaching for up to six months. Those who would like to pursue further advancement in their careers also have the opportunity to participate in our leadership training series.

**Target Group:** Most of the cohorts consist of mature workers, young women and immigrants—many from underserved communities experiencing precarious employment and livelihoods. Other factors include: low self-esteem, social isolation, poverty, ageism, lack of training/credentials, domestic violence, and unfamiliarity with today’s workplace expectations and lack of employer connections.

## INNOVATIVE DESIGN ELEMENTS

**Continuum of Services:** Women registered in the Administrative Clerk Certificate program benefit from a one-stop training and employment facility with access to a range of workshops, such as financial literacy, wellness workshops, dress for success, managing change, etc.

**Career Assessment:** Takes place for two weeks and focuses on self-exploration. It includes activities such as Personality Dimensions™, which allows participants to learn about themselves, their strengths, interests, personality type and goals, and to create an action plan.

**Job Readiness and Placement Services:** As part of the program, participants gain access to a Job Developer and receive assistance in their job search. Depending on the individual needs, participants are provided with opportunities ranging from on-the-job training, placements, coaching, job shadowing and mentoring activities.

**Job Finding Club:** Takes place immediately after the completion of the program. The aim is to keep the momentum and morale of participants as they begin their job search journey. It is offered for one week, to support the maintenance of the social connections developed within the program and to provide additional job search support to participants.

**Leadership and Professional Development:** We encourage lifelong learning and participation in one or more of our leadership training courses. We have integrated a pathway through which women have the opportunity to access leadership training, to encourage lifelong learning. In addition, they are invited to network events with other graduates and employers to keep them moving toward building sustainable futures.



**Implementing the BSF tools:** We have been incubating the BSF tool for over three years and have created a workshop on asset development. The mapping tool and process help participants and staff visualize their strengths and areas for improvement; it shows in a simple way how change (mostly positive) is achieved over time.

**Asset Mapping Workshop:** This is a key lesson offered through the Administrative Clerk Certificate Program. Through this lesson, participants gain an understanding of the foundations for success by using the BSF framework. The Asset Mapping lesson allows for self-exploration and encourages participants to identify their goals, evaluate their assets, develop a plan for asset acquisition, and identify possible resources to support asset development.

**Digital and Computer Literacy:** A key feature of this 11-week training program is Digital and Computer Literacy skill development, as it is a basic requirement for a large number of jobs. Computer training is offered at two levels through the Administrative Clerk Certificate program: 1) a three-day introduction to essential computer skills, which aims to support participants in gaining familiarity with basic computer use skills; and 2) a ten-12-day formalized computer training, focusing on Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel, that includes both training and graded assignments.

**1:1 Coaching with Participants:** Addresses complicated issues using the asset mapping workshop designed from a strength-based approach. It helps give women hope and build resilience to cope with some of their issues as well as challenges that they face. It is client centred and a valuable opportunity to share freely.



**Streamlined Intake:** Group intake—we use a supplementary intake form to capture demographic indicators for future considerations and data analysis. We have extended the assessment period prior to registration to get to know clients better. We spend more time with them to coordinate their most suitable options, which may be a referral elsewhere or registration with the Administrative Clerk Certificate program. We found that the women are comfortable in a group setting at intake, and often share with each other. It is also a more efficient process for making the most of staffing resources.

**Meeting the demographic through customized content delivery:** We have always allowed clients to progress at their pace (e.g. by offering self-directed tools for participants who work at a faster pace). In terms of demographic sensitivity, we have addressed an observed generational divide regarding technology challenges among mature job seekers; extra help is available to them as they see fit. Further flexibility is built in to respond to client needs (e.g. staff are attentive to personal situations, reasons to discontinue the program, and can make accommodations to learn from home).



**Enhancements to Follow-up Structure:** We have adopted a more formal structure, plus an on-going time slot each Tuesday for past graduates to motivate and support participants for up to six months. They meet with a designated staff person for job search support and instructions on various topics until they are successful. The aim is to enhance employment and retention.



## MELISSA'S STORY, YWCA TORONTO (TORONTO, ON)

After losing her job, Melissa struggled to find her self-worth—and place—in the workforce. After taking several programs at YWCA Toronto's Employment & Training Centre located at 3090 Kingston Road, she realized just how capable she really was.

In her own words:

*“My past had been difficult to say the least. I was a teen mom, but I managed to handle my responsibilities. I had always been financially independent and found success in my career until two years ago when I was diagnosed with major depression and anxiety. Very quickly my life, family, and career suffered along with me. After a suicide attempt and hospitalization, I lost my job along with my house and my hope. A year ago, I went on social assistance and truly felt that my life was over.*”

*My case worker suggested the Employment Focus program and, hesitantly, I agreed. However, I quickly realized it was the best decision I have ever made. Without the confidence I gained in the Employment Focus program, I would have never even considered going back to school. Throughout that 10-week program, not only did I grow, but I had the pleasure of watching other women in the same situation discover their full potential and find their career paths. I will forever be grateful that programs like this are available, and that YWCA Toronto staff are here to teach and support us.*

*Immediately after Employment Focus finished, I started the Business Administrative Clerk course. Again, I was completely blown away by the incredible support provided by our teachers which gave me such drive to succeed.”*

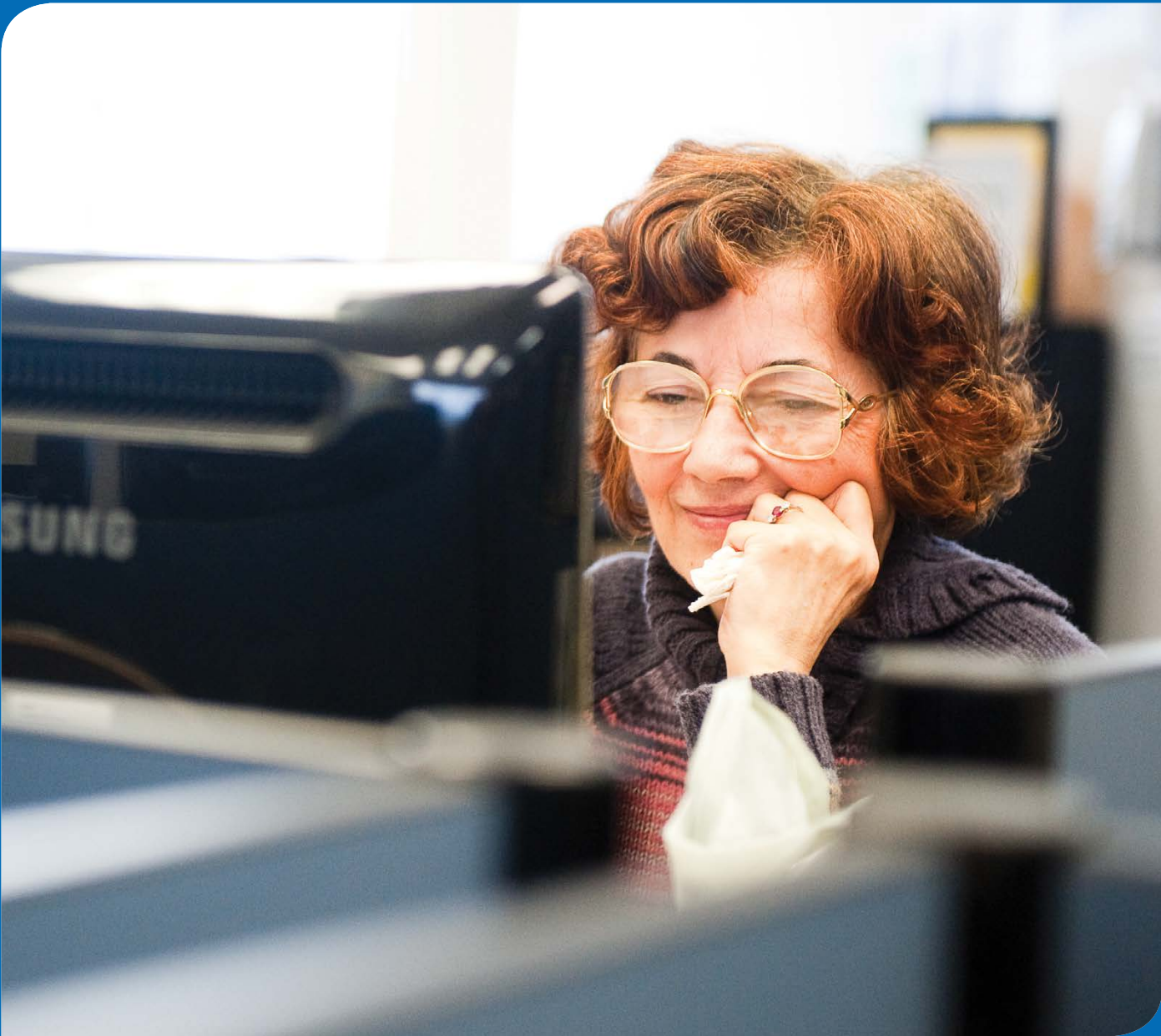




YWCA Toronto Employment and Training program graduates.



# SECTION 4: Project Findings



4

## OVERVIEW

The YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) project led and facilitated by YWCA Toronto has documented positive outcomes at individual, program/organizational and community levels. All collaborators drew on the emerging YWCA BSF model to create the regional adaptations shared in this Compendium, whether working with their participants at the pre-employment and/or employment stages of essential skills training. All have taken a holistic, asset-based lens to refining their programs, and to their strategies for building employer and community connections. Some collaborators have also built capacity through the project to begin offering the two later stage components of the model: Professional Development Services and Leadership & Business Services.

Many collaborators, however, experienced challenges as a result of changes in the socio-economy and in their funding. Many continue to struggle to meet the demand for essential skills programs among underserved people in their communities, in the context of a growing income gap between rich and poor as well as a labour market that requires increasingly sophisticated skills of its workforce. These challenges are explored in more detail as part of our learning and recommendations in **Sections 5 and 6**.

As detailed in **Section 2.2** above, the research process unfolded in two phases after project start-up:

- **2015-2016**—the pilot programs and evaluation research process.
- **2017-2018**—the post-pilot phase, during which collaborators continued to develop and deliver essential skills programs using adapted elements from YWCA Toronto’s BSF model and further tracked their participant outcomes. They also strengthened their capacity building strategies through employer and community engagement strategies, and contributed to knowledge exchange from the project through the Learning Community and their contributions to the Compendium and Toolkit.

*Note: since YWCA Toronto did not have the capacity to conduct a formal evaluation of 2017-2018 post-pilot outcomes, the quantitative and qualitative data presented for this phase were drawn from collaborator reports.*



In December 2016, ESE collaborators work together to discuss next steps at the second national forum in Toronto, ON.

## A SNAPSHOT OF YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES PROJECT OVERALL OUTCOMES: 2015-2018

### 1: Individual Participant Level

A cumulative total of over 550 individual participants were involved nationally in this pilot project from 2015 to 2018:

- 154 participants completed the pilot program research process documented during the project evaluation between March 2015 and summer 2016, and collated in the evaluation team's November 2016 reports (a higher number of participants completed some/all of their training, but not the entire evaluation process).
- An additional 83 program participants were included in the follow-up data collection process that lasted into 2017, bringing the total number to 237.
- An additional 313 participants were involved in programs delivered by collaborator Associations during the post-pilot phase that lasted until end of December 2018.

### 2: Program/Organizational Level

Nine Associations, including YWCA Toronto, delivered pilot programs that drew on the YWCA BSF model, and customized its components to their demographic populations and regional contexts. Eight programs were offered in English, and one in both official languages.

More organizations were also interested in learning from and adapting the model to their program populations, but it was beyond the capacity of YWCA Toronto to include them in the project. We have offered regional learning sessions through our Learning Community, and hope this Compendium and the accompanying Toolkit will foster further learning.

### 3: Community Level

To date, the project learning collaborative has reached out across Canada to over 50 employment and training organizations, literacy and essential skills organizations, Indigenous communities, settlement organizations, youth, specialized services organizations (such as those serving women), and to the communities involved in the research (see below pp. 99-101).

## 4.1 KEY FINDINGS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM RESEARCH: 2015-2016

This phase of project research has demonstrated how flexibly and successfully the YWCA BSF model can be adapted to essential skills programs for diverse populations, and in a range of different local contexts. Although the collaborator pilot programs were short in length, they showed some impressive outcomes and received an overwhelmingly positive response from participants. The research findings suggest that the model can also offer practical strategies for growing program/organizational and community capacity. The project research further produced tried and tested evaluation tools at individual participant and program/organizational capacity-building levels.

Collaborators noted that the networks, resources, relationships and processes that ensure effective program promotion and recruitment can take time to build and strengthen. Many of the first pilot program participant cohorts experienced weak enrolment, with a lower representation of employment-ready participants. All collaborators involved in this phase worked to enhance their outreach and recruitment over the course of pilot program delivery, and by the end had increased the size of their cohorts.

### 4.1.1. INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT LEVEL

A total of 154 participants completed the pilot evaluation research process (from March 2015 to summer 2016). While the size of the overall pilot program population was not large enough to draw empirical conclusions, clear and detailed evidence emerged about the impact of collaborators' adaptations of YWCA Toronto's holistic asset-based model with their participants. In a relatively short timeframe, the programs promoted important changes in participants' lives. Even small changes related to training and employment represented significant results, given the high level of instability of many of the participants' lives and their low employment rates at entry to the pilot programs.

### NOTES ON INTERPRETING THE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT DATA:

- Data from pre-employment and employment pilot programs were collected together by the 2015-2016 evaluation research.
- Not all participants counted in the tracking and documentation of pilot outcomes were able to complete the spring/summer 2016 Participant Outcomes Survey, resulting in a slight variance of numbers shown in the data from this research phase.
- After the evaluation reporting in November 2016 and into 2017, collaborators conducted follow-up about employment and training outcomes with individuals who had been involved in the pilot programs and with new program cohorts. The YWCA ESE team has collated this round of participant data and refined it to show pre-employment and employment programs' outcomes separately (see below, p. 92).
- Up until December 2018, the YWCA ESE team and collaborators continued to capture data about program participants and other project outcomes (described in **Section 4.2**).

### Overall Changes in Participant Assets

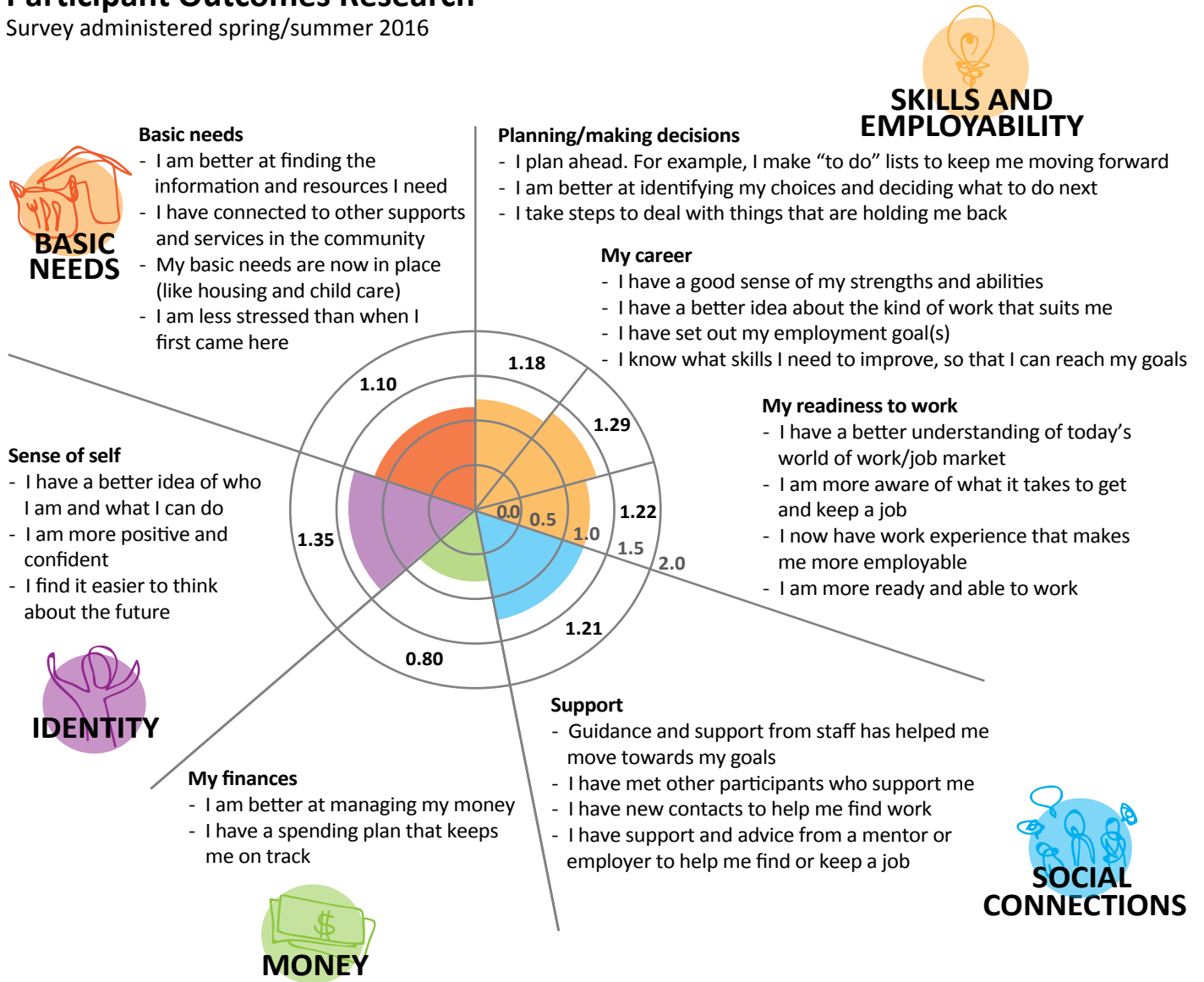
**Figure 12:** 2015-2016 Research Asset Mapping Tool: Individual Participant Level was implemented by collaborator staff with their participants at the start and end of the pilot programs, for participants to self-reflect on and assess changes in their assets as a result of their involvement in the pilot programs. The map shows a spring/summer 2016 picture of asset growth in the overall pilot program population, and is fairly even in all areas apart from "Money." The "statements" within each asset area were used with participants in the Participant Outcomes Survey.

Figure 12: 2015-2016 Research Asset Mapping Tool: Individual Participant Level Overall Asset Growth

# Building Sustainable Futures Participant Outcomes Research

Survey administered spring/summer 2016

## Asset Map of Aggregate Results



**Scale**  
N=155  
This is a sample of over 75% of the 200+ participants impacted by the BSF program.  
**Composite Score**  
Scale: -2 (Strongly Disagree) to +2 (Strongly Agree)  
The scale has been presented from 0 to 2 as there were no negative scores.

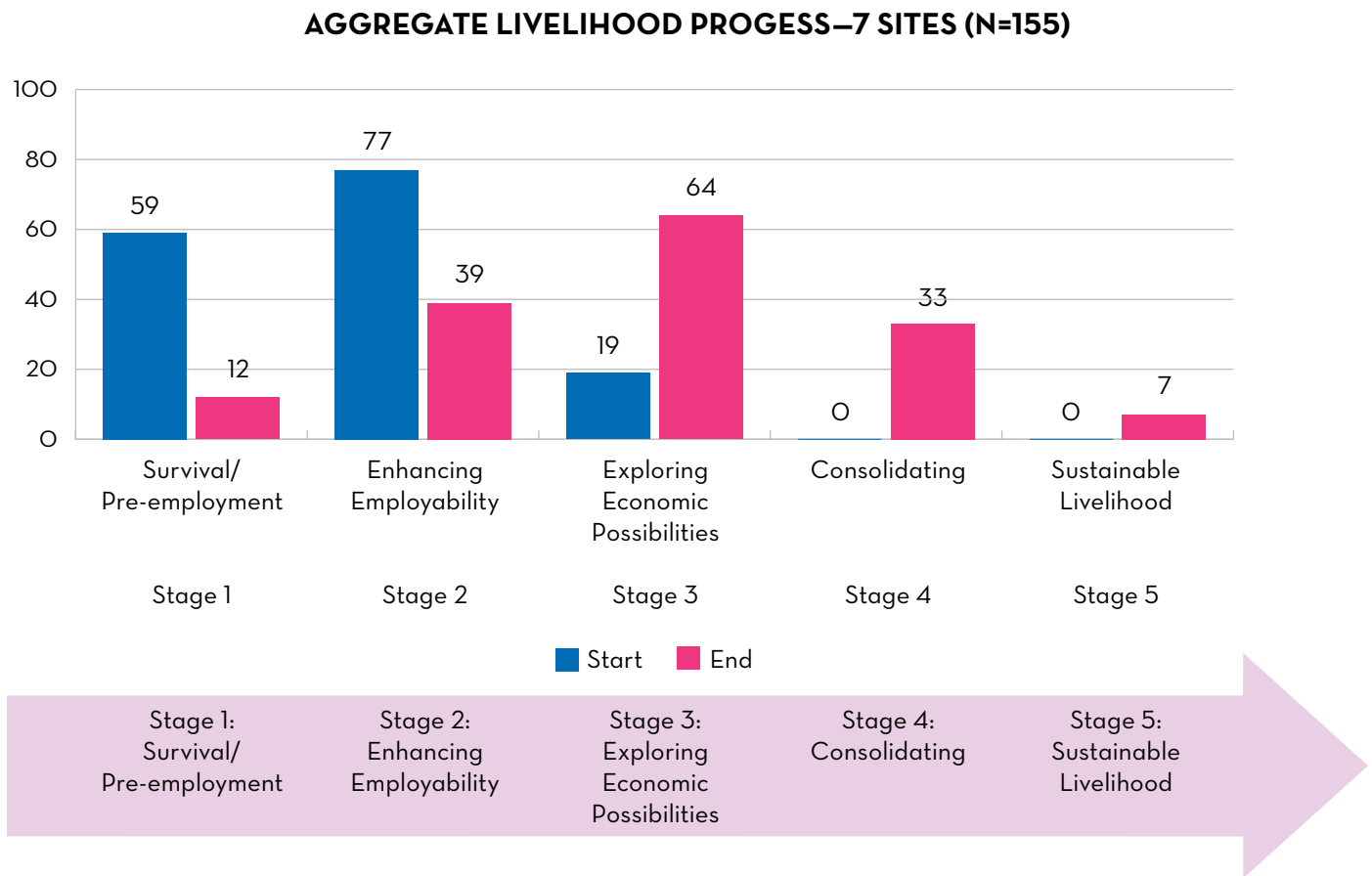
© Resources for Results & Eko Nomos



Collaborator staff reported in their interviews with the evaluation team that many participants were beginning to grow a foundation of stability and skills, and were building on their strengths. Anecdotal evidence and comments from participants suggest they are piecing their income together, using self-employment activities to supplement their income while at school or pursuing more formal employment.

Many are exploring economic possibilities and consolidating their employment status. Seven were actually identified by staff as having achieved a sustainable livelihood. **Figure 13** below shows a July 2016 aggregate picture of participant livelihood progress based on staff assessment.

**Figure 13: Participant Livelihood Progress (July 2016 Snapshot)**



*“I felt more comfortable in the program and now everywhere I’m passing, I’m still feeling the same way. I have no fear and there is no more stress like before, I’m not asking myself what to do or where to go because I got everything I needed from the program.”*

**YMCA-YWCA NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION** participant

## Overall Employment and Training Outcomes

Participants commented on the value of the programs in advancing their employment plans for the future:

### 2015-2016 HIGHLIGHTS OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OUTCOMES:

At pilot program start in March 2015, as captured by baseline staff data, a total of 220 participants were enrolled in pilot programs. Of these, as captured by participant report: 3% were working in a full-time job, 8% were working in a part-time job, 7% were doing odd jobs (such as babysitting) for cash and 3% were self-employed.

After the program, as participants reported in the spring/summer 2016 Participant Outcomes Survey (N=154):

- 16% were working in a full-time job, 21% were working in a part-time job, 51.9% were currently earning money through work they were doing (including self-employment and casual work);
- 41% have new certifications through short training programs (e.g. food safety, First Aid, etc.) offered by the pilot programs;
- 23% have gone on to further formal training or education; and
- 19% have improved their English language skills and two individuals (1.3%) have improved their French language skills.

Of respondents who had found work and reported improvements in its quality:

- 72% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with its quality;
- 61% reported “I am making better use of my skills and training,” which indicates solid, positive alignment between ESE training and job search results;
- 50% reported that “my work is more regular and stable”; and
- 45% felt that “the work I am doing now is moving me toward my career goals.”

Progress with job search:

- 33% reported having developed realistic job plans as a result of the program;
- 47% reported being engaged in a job search;
- 8% had found volunteer positions, which help to build employability; and
- 5% reported having been placed in a temporary job placement or internship.

*“Prior to this program, I only had some housekeeping experience and some front desk experience from an eight-room inn. Now I have audit experience from a 225-room hotel.”*

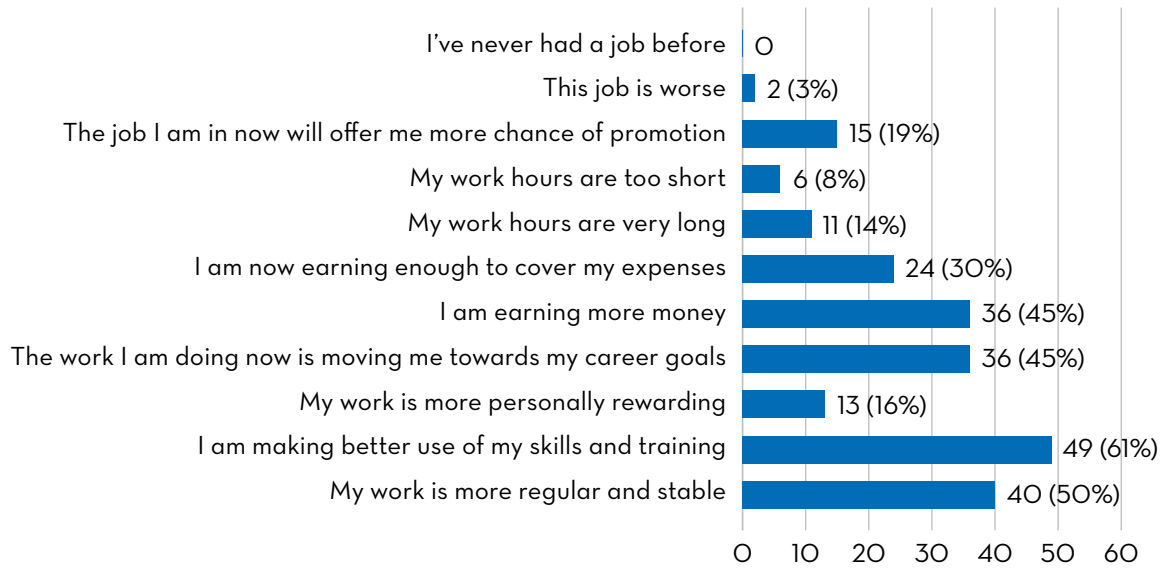
**YWCA SASKATOON** participant

Figure 14: Improvements in Employment and Quality of Work

**Q24. QUALITY OF CURRENT WORK (N=80 OF 154)**

Those survey participants who reported being employed were asked to comment on the quality of their work.

Respondents may have selected multiple categories.



**A Closer Picture of Participant Asset Building**

The programs have shown a clear impact in building participants' confidence and sense of self, confirming the importance of individual asset-based reflection and customized, culturally appropriate activities targeted to specific populations. This was particularly true in Indigenous programming.

*“Most of the First Nations students are disconnected from their culture due to the residential school legacy. However, they are extremely interested in it, and were highly attentive when the learning was introduced through Indigenous teachings/history/ceremonies/etc.”*

**YWCA THOMPSON** Staff

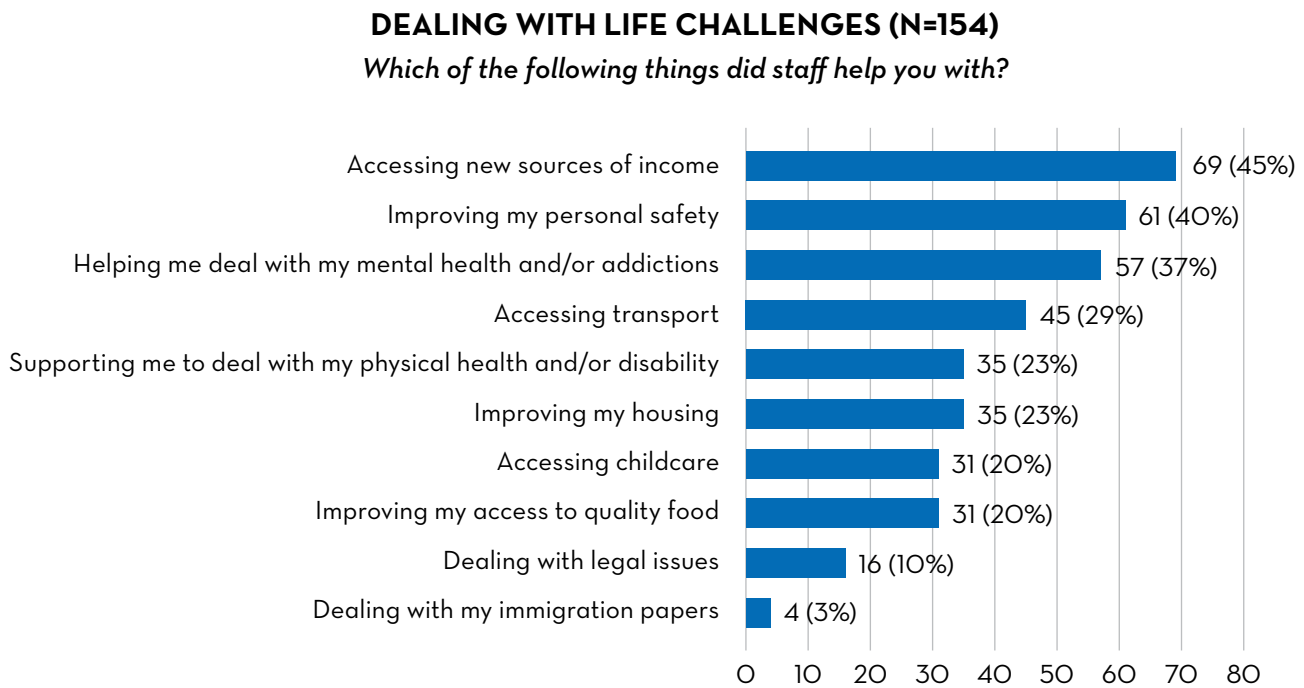
In the Participant Outcomes Survey, participants also reported having a better self-assessment of their strengths and a better sense of the kind of work that would suit them. They noted growth in their social connections, confirming the importance of offering one-to-one time with staff and promoting these connections. Staff and participants further noted how peer learning and group dynamics were powerful in building personal strengths:

*“They help each other problem solve, stay motivated and cheerlead for one another. Responding to the specific needs of the group, as they become apparent, not only gives the women a sense of ownership over the program, but also makes the biggest impact. If they’re worried about Christmas (because of money, past traumas, etc.), then that becomes our starting place and we can use that in our examples and come out of class with real solutions and resources.”*

**YWCA MONCTON** staff

The evaluation data reveals the continuing importance of ensuring participants’ basic needs. Staff are fully aware that people need a solid base of stability in housing, safety, mental health and food security if they are to stay in employment training programs and, ultimately, enter and move forward in the labour market.

Figure 15: Dealing With Life Challenges: Which of the Following Things Did Our Staff Help You With?



### Some Differences in Reporting Among the Program Populations

Across all of the programs that involved Indigenous participants, this population was significantly more likely to report receiving support to access new sources of income (61%), to address their mental health needs and/or substance use issues (59%), to improve their personal safety (58%), to access childcare (38%), and to access housing (38%).

*“This program has become more than employment training. We have been discussing and addressing some of the larger social and mental health issues that women in the program are facing, so that they are motivated and focused on getting a job and housing.”*

**YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT** Staff

At 57%, youth respondents were significantly more likely than others (39%) to report that they had support in “accessing new sources of income.”

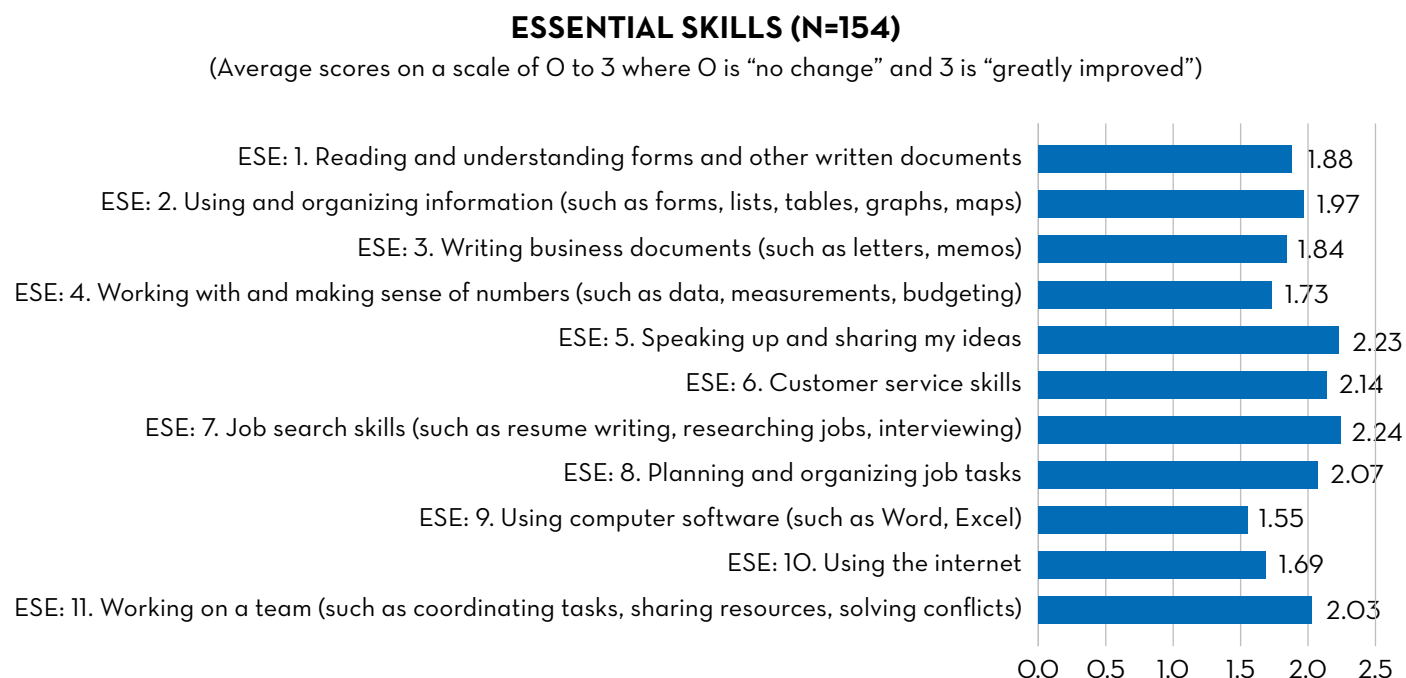
Immigrant respondents were significantly less likely than others to require support to improve their mental and personal health (by a 40% difference), and to access housing (a 28% difference) and new sources of income (an 18% difference). Mature worker respondents were significantly less likely than others to report needing support with accessing income (a 32% difference), housing (a 16% difference) and childcare (a 25% difference).

Participants continued to report financial challenges that programs have limited resources to address. These challenges are often part of the larger context of socio-economic inequity that is beyond an individual’s control.

### Changes in Essential Skills Levels

The survey also explored changes in levels of essential skills, asking participants to report improvements in specific skill areas. Across all programs, the areas in which participants grew the most were: “job search skills,” “speaking up and sharing my ideas,” “customer service skills,” and “planning and organizing job tasks.”

Figure 16: Participants’ Enhanced Essential Skills after the Programs





Respondents who self-identified as Indigenous reported significant differences in the essential skills that they had developed in two specific areas. At 58% of the overall participant population, they were about 25% more likely to say that they had “greatly improved” in “speaking up and sharing my ideas.” They were also 24% more likely to say that they had “greatly improved” in “working on a team” (including coordinating tasks, sharing resources, solving conflicts, etc.). As staff also emphasized from their observations and from direct participant feedback, certified skills training programs such as First Aid, WHMIS, etc. have been particularly important and powerful in building skills, confidence and employability in programs working with Indigenous people.

*“I could save someone’s life now.”*

**YWCA THOMPSON** participant, after certification in First Aid

*“I’m going back to school starting in January; I’ll be studying office admin. My sewing’s going to pay for the groceries, I hope.”*

**YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT** participant

### Promoting Continuous Learning

All of the programs implemented a full employability assessment, personality testing, and a range of other asset-based assessments to support people to explore their employment options, as well as for some participants to look at long-term career directions. Asset mapping added a new, holistic dimension to the picture. It gave participants language and a visual framework for assessing their strengths and capabilities in a broad and more balanced range of asset areas and on an ongoing basis, in order to sustain long-term progress.

Participants expressed how much they had learned about themselves from the process:

*“The asset mapping activity made it easier for me to identify areas that I needed to address. Specifically, this meant that I needed to attend to self-care. My low energy was, at least partially, a result of poor health. I decided to make diet and exercise a priority in my life.”*

**YWCA METRO VANCOUVER** participant

### Building the Confidence to Move Forward

Programs work intentionally on this vital foundational area in which participants reported the greatest change: 53% strongly agreed in the survey that, “I have a better idea of who I am and what I can do.” Staff also devoted time and resources to customize their learning processes, and resources to the cultures, preferences and identities of their diverse demographic populations. Self-knowledge has translated into self-confidence. In the survey, 52% strongly agreed that they had become “more positive and confident” as a result of their participation in the program.

Participants remarked on the importance of this work in building their self-confidence and resilience:

*“The program opens the mind, and opens doors and opportunities, and what more can I say. I’m proud of having taken this program, Power of Trades, because I have a better idea of myself now, and I would suggest to other newcomers that they begin the program immediately, to have a better life.”*

**YMCA-YWCA NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION** participant

*“It has helped me realize who I am and where I came from.”*

**YWCA SASKATOON** participant

*“Changes in my life? I’m being proactive, full of life, love and hope. Respecting my peers and others. Taking more time to plan things. I am job ready and willing to do anything. I’m being honest.”*

**YWCA THOMPSON** participant

*“This program has given me a positive outlook and I’m using my potential for a successful future. I am more confident that regardless of my past shortcomings I now have the skills to make a great contribution to the workforce.”*

**YWCA TORONTO** participant

A full 40% of survey respondents strongly agreed that they now “find it easier to think about the future,” which is a huge step in strength building and setting goals for long-term future progress. In the words of the participants themselves:

*“This group has made me think further than the next six months. I now have a five-year plan.”*

**YWCA MONCTON** participant

*“I learned to sew. I see a future that’s not me working for someone else.”*

**YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT** participant

*“Before I started LAUNCH, I didn’t have any structure. I had nothing planned for the day and I never had anything to look forward to. Since I started coming to the workshop, I now have structure and I feel excited every morning coming here.”*

**YWCA HALIFAX** participant

## **Building Connections and Community**

Program staff also worked proactively to reduce participants’ social isolation and boost their resilience and self-esteem. Staff designed and delivered peer-based learning that builds empathy and strong relationships of support among participants. These relationships were reported as lasting well beyond the group training.

As participants commented:

*“This program helped me get my confidence back. Coming out of the house every day, meeting people who are more or less sailing in the same boat, having a mentor, and best of all a positive atmosphere helped me a lot.”*

**YWCA TORONTO** participant

*“The all-female program made me feel safe and like I could share openly with my sisters.”*

**YWCA METRO VANCOUVER** participant

The peer-based aspect of the program also seems to build leadership. In programs that promote peer-learning and engage participants in teaching each other, participants mentioned making real gains in their self-perception and role:

*“I taught [the Coordinator] and some of the other ladies to sew! I like to teach, I wanna teach at Arctic College, for the sewing program.”*

**YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT** participant

The programs also supported participants to develop personal and business networks and contacts: 41% of survey respondents strongly agreed that their programs helped them to connect to “new contacts to help me find work,” and 38% strongly agreed that they now have “support and advice from a mentor or employer to help me find or keep a job.”

Participants emphasized the value of these connections in supporting them toward future goals:

*“I learned a lot about networking and a lot about the hidden job market and how valuable informational interviews are. I learned a lot about how to use social media with your job search and to value the community of your ladies because they’re your gateway to beginning your search.... The community the YWCA created was really valuable. Being in a transition and going through a job search can feel isolating, and this is a great resource to get out of that isolation and move forward.”*

**YWCA METRO VANCOUVER** participant

*“This program has helped me update some work skills and provided me with a network that hopefully will help me find a great job.”*

**YWCA TORONTO** participant

*“The whole process made me aware of the different areas that I needed to address and gave me ideas about next steps that I needed to take. Building a sustainable livelihood is not just about applying for jobs. I am now in a much stronger place to take on work. I have a professional wardrobe, I have more financial awareness, I have an idea of how to research companies, and I have strengthened my support and connections by coming to the Centre and attending events with more mindfulness.”*

**YWCA METRO VANCOUVER** participant

## A Further Snapshot of Employment and Training Outcomes

The charts below show a picture of pilot participant follow-up and new participant data about employment and training outcomes collected with a total of 237 individuals after the evaluation ended. The YWCA ESE project team has refined the data to show pre-employment and employment outcomes separately in Figures 18 and 19.

Figure 17: 2016-2017 Overall Participant Outcomes

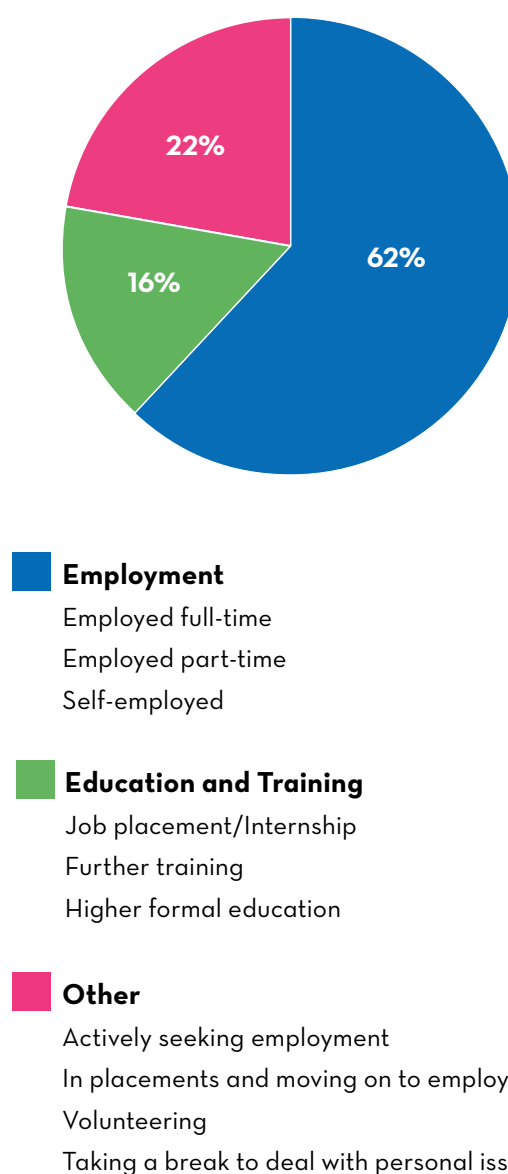
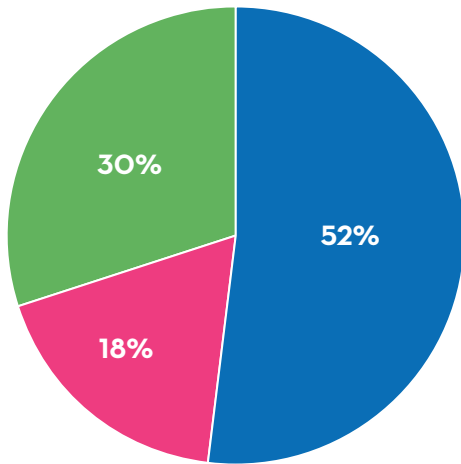
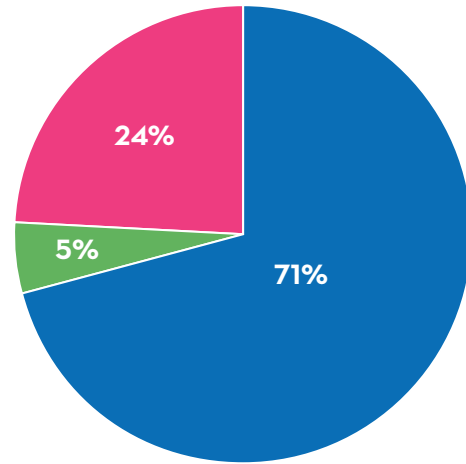


Figure 18: 2016-2017 Pre-employment Program Outcomes



- YWCA Agvvik Nunavut—Sewing to Success (Iqaluit, Nunavut)
- YWCA Thompson—Steps to Success (Manitoba)
- YWCA Halifax—two programs: LAUNCH; Step Ahead (Nova Scotia)
- YWCA Moncton—Women on the Move (New Brunswick)

Figure 19: 2016-2017 Employment Program Outcomes



- YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region – Power of Trades/Puissance des Métiers (Ottawa, Ontario)
- YWCA Saskatoon—Essential Skills for Employment in Hospitality (Saskatchewan)
- YWCA Metro Vancouver—Focus@Work (British Columbia)
- YWCA Hamilton—two programs: Pre-Apprenticeship General Machinist and Industrial Mechanic (Millwright) Training for Women; Women’s Entrepreneurship Program (Ontario)
- YWCA Toronto—Administrative Clerk Certificate Program, Education and Training Institute (Ontario)

**Employment**

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed

**Education and Training**

- Job placement /Internship
- Further training
- Higher formal education

**Other**

- Actively seeking employment
- In placements and moving on to employment
- Volunteering
- Taking a break to deal with personal issues

### A Sampling of Sectors in which participants gained employment after completing the programs:

- Pre-apprenticeship
- Small Business Start-up
- Self-employment
- Trades
- Customer Service
- Hospitality
- Administrative
- Information and Technology
- Finance
- Retail
- Human and Social Services
- Education

### A Sampling of Jobs that participants obtained after completing the programs:

- Administrative Assistant
- Advertising Assistant
- Assistant Librarian
- Baker
- Cashier
- Content Strategist
- Cook
- Customer Service Representative
- Delivery Driver
- Educational Assistant
- Fast Food Clerk
- Fibre Optic Technician
- Finance Assistant
- Fire Control Advisor
- Flood Restoration
- General Labourer
- Housing Worker
- Instructor
- Irrigation Installer
- Maintenance Worker
- Painters
- Practical Nurse
- Receptionist
- Retail Manager
- Sales Associate
- Security Guard
- Substitute Teacher
- Tire Technician
- Transmission Apprentice
- Youth Program Facilitator
- Retail Sales Manager
- Recycling Sorter
- Front Desk Attendant
- Camp Cook
- Online Marketing
- Memberships Representative

## 4.1.2 PROGRAM/ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY • BUILDING LEVEL

Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach, the YWCA ESE team, collaborator staff and the evaluation team drew on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach to identify five asset areas for collaborators to reflect, assess and self-report on the strengths of their organizational capacity to deliver their program. See **Section 1.2.3** above, p. 34 for an image of the Program/Organizational Capacity Building Asset Map that was used at the start of the pilot programs and then again at the end of program delivery.

This qualitative assessment explored:

- **Client-focused:** How the program engages clients to promote sustainable livelihoods—includes client-focused delivery, integrated program design, in-house knowledge and expertise.
- **Connected:** How the program builds connections and outreach to strengthen programming—includes referral and promotion collaboration and partnership, and communication.
- **Effective:** How the program ensures good management and quality delivery—includes program management and coordination, human resources and continuous improvement.
- **Resilient:** How the program promotes its stability and continuation—includes high profile, program sustainability and readiness for succession (in case of staff turnover).
- **Agile:** How the program creates conditions that support learning, innovation and improved outcomes—includes learning and knowledge translation, program monitoring and evaluation, and policy and advocacy.



All of the collaborators noted that the capacity building focus of the national project and the new language of the Program/Organizational Capacity Building Asset Map have helped them to take a more intentional approach as to how they design, document, reflect on and work to improve their program models and delivery, and to find new ways of building capacity and sustainability. As one collaborator expressed:

*“The pilot kind of cemented some of the things we did already and enhanced them. It gives a nice framework, a checklist of what we are going to do, which will make our work easier going forward. Especially for [our Trainer] in the classroom, having everything laid out is a big asset—the whole design and the process. Sometimes we get caught up in what needs to happen right now and we forget that there is a lot of other stuff going on.”*

**YWCA THOMPSON** staff

While collaborators brought with them considerable expertise and experience in essential skills training with their diverse populations, an interesting finding from reflections on their initial and second “mappings” of their capacity assets was that some said that they had, in the beginning, rated themselves too highly in certain areas. They mentioned how the asset-based approach had supported them to identify more clearly and specifically areas in which they could improve delivery of their programs. According to their capacity self-assessments, all collaborators strengthened their base of capacity assets over the year of the pilot program delivery in a balanced way that can support them to sustain their learning and innovations.

## CLIENT-FOCUSED ASSETS

A “client-focused” model, such as the YWCA BSF model, encapsulates the idea that essential skills interventions are most effective starting where people are and rolling out key essential skills on a just-in-time basis, while also offering support to encourage the more entrepreneurial traits of independence and self-motivation that are known to enhance job seekers’ success in today’s challenging labour market.

All collaborators reported strength in their Client-focused asset area, and yet they still managed to enhance their assets in this area over the course of pilot program delivery. They adapted the asset-based Sustainable Livelihoods mapping tools and appropriate elements of YWCA Toronto’s emerging model to enhance participant self-assessment, priority setting and action planning. Some of these adaptations to fit their demographic group and local context were extremely thoughtful and inventive. For example, Agvvik Nunavut completely revised the Individual Participant Asset map to incorporate Inuit adult learning values and graphics (for an image of this map, see **Section 3**, p.56). Collaborators also worked intentionally to improve the design and flow of essential skills training activities and took time to explore new resources shared by fellow collaborators.

As one collaborator commented:

*“This has been great learning for our Employment and Learning Centre’s resources. We’ve been revising and updating our job search components, and lessons for communication and time management skills, which will be used on an as-needed basis.”*

**YWCA SASKATOON** staff

## CONNECTED ASSETS

In this asset area, the YWCA BSF model is designed to work intentionally to promote connections that bridge participants to employment, adapting their programming and strategies to clients' needs and to their specific local context. It builds community and referral networks, enhances engagement in partnership building, and promotes a strong leadership profile in the community. More specialized, sectoral employment approaches further enable strategic working relationships with employers and other sectoral actors (e.g. Industry councils), providing up-to-date intelligence about the local job market and connecting more participants to practical work experience.

Collaborators perceived the Connected area as the one most strengthened during program delivery, reflecting their efforts to promote community and business engagement. All pursued strategies to enhance community engagement in training by inviting guest speakers, Elders and mentors from the community to participate in their programming. Two collaborators pursued formal partnerships with post-secondary institutions to provide formal technical training: with Arctic College in Iqaluit and Mohawk College in Hamilton. Many collaborators developed proactive community marketing strategies. Outreach capacity appears to have focused on promotion to other community agencies and to social assistance staff. For example, YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region developed a new program brochure designed to reach social assistance managers and staff in order to boost awareness and referrals.

Expanding community connections to the business world was a new area of focused activity for most of the collaborators. Drawing on YWCA Toronto's experience in bridging job seekers and employment through relationship building with employers, all of the collaborators pursued strategies to increase their strength in this area. Some sites made presentations at businesses, some organized one-to-one meetings, and others further strengthened connections to local business networks and service groups.

*"I'm really proud of our employer connections and partnerships. I feel like we've got a good set of documents to guide the process and help employers to make it a good experience.... We also have an ambassador program—we interview other employment counsellors at YWCA Saskatoon to share information about programs in the community, supporting mock interviews. And participants have a better idea of what the Y can do for them."*

**YWCA SASKATOON** staff

## EFFECTIVE ASSETS

The holistic approach of the YWCA BSF model promotes a more coherent and economical use of staffing and resources, resulting in more streamlined, timely and customized client service. Implementation of the approach builds more integrated, de-siloed programming that can mobilize a broad range of organizational resources to support participants to move forward. The strength-based Sustainable Livelihoods approach seems to improve program design and delivery at various levels, including program design, curriculum development, group facilitation, client coaching, resource deployment and evaluation.

Most collaborator sites experienced challenges in the Effective area due to turnover of front-line staff and facilitators during the program delivery, and two also experienced turnover at the management level. Staff are often already stressed by the demanding nature of their work and client relationships. Staff turnover causes additional stress and programming gaps for those staff who remain. Collaborators learned that flexibility in staff roles and positions is important in smoothing ongoing operations. In the case of YWCA Metro Vancouver, for example, there was turnover.

*“Right now, we have one person on mat leave and have faced the turnover of two Job Developers. One position has been vacant for three months, though now we have established it as a permanent position. We have had to leverage interim support from the Y’s Employment Access staff and hire short-term staff for administrative tasks, so that core staff could cover some of the client workload.”*

**YWCA METRO VANCOUVER** staff

Collaborators have made changes in the way that they manage programs and coordinate staffing, in order to deploy more efficiently the additional human resources required to offer a client-centred approach to programming. In the case of smaller programs with fewer staff, managers have identified versatile members of their team who understand client engagement and can play multiple roles in the project.

Adopting the YWCA BSF model’s asset-based approach and tools appear to have improved the effectiveness of programs at various levels, including curriculum, coaching, evaluation and even fundraising. As one collaborator reported, the approach may be expanded to other programs offered by their Association.

*“We had a positive, smooth transition into Sustainable Livelihoods and would like to use it in our other programs, but we’re not there yet. The project was an opportunity to pilot it and will also be good for fundraising—we can say what difference we’re making in women’s lives.”*

**YWCA HAMILTON** staff

## RESILIENT ASSETS

Building up strength in this asset area can present the greatest challenge for organizations, particularly those with smaller capacity. Adapting a holistic, strength-based model can create a major shift in the design and structuring of essential skills programming and resources. As with most pioneering efforts, there can be resistance in-house. An even larger challenge is the current siloed funding context that promotes competition and saps organizations' core capacity. Much policy work remains to be done, for example to show funders the depth and breadth of resources that programs realistically require to support many participants toward employment readiness.

Some collaborators noted that their Resilient area has not changed a lot during the course of the research because the short-term, project-based funding context persists, creating a level of continuous instability that they do not expect will improve in the short term.

*“Delayed funding meant we had to completely rethink our program for the project.”*

**YWCA HAMILTON** staff

Raising community awareness of the parent Association and the program and its goals has proven to be an important sustainability strategy. Collaborators worked to build a strong identity and higher visibility, which contributed to the credibility of their initiative, the development of partnerships and the effectiveness of fundraising efforts.

YWCA Moncton decided to use their project program, Women on the Move, as an opportunity to extend services to marginalized women in Saint John. Working in a new community required a more strategic approach and the cultivation of long-term relationships. Staff had to work systematically and intentionally to distinguish their program from other organizations in a context of intense organizational competition and precariousness.

*“When we first came into Saint John, other organizations felt threatened and didn't want to work with us. Gradually we were able to explain our role and how we can fill service gaps and add value to other organizations and their women clients.”*

**YWCA MONCTON** staff

Women on the Move chose its new delivery location in the heart of a priority neighbourhood. This central geographic location has amplified the program's visibility and promoted ease of access.

*“We did great work getting the word out about our program and creating a busy office with lots of people coming in to us—the problem now is that we can't keep up with the demand!”*

**YWCA MONCTON** staff

In many cases, collaborators patched together resources to develop a full delivery system. Strategies included: 1) finding extra money to finance program adaptations and specializations responding to the specific needs of a demographic population; 2) giving participants what they need to support business development (for example, the Agvvik Nunavut program provided seal skin, needles, threads and other supplies for crafts production); and 3) identifying additional community money to finance certifications such as Food Handling, First Aid and WHMIS.

## AGILE ASSETS

This asset area is about creating conditions that support learning, innovation and improved outcomes. The national project was itself designed as a pilot knowledge exchange initiative to provide practitioners with a chance to reflect on their practice, and to test and assess innovative design components. It gave them the time and research tools to re-examine their current program design and delivery. They could explore fresh approaches, and how to adopt/adapt these new elements for their local context and for the needs of specific client groups. The implementation of an asset-based approach and tools has also provided the learning collaborative with a common language and a clearer picture of the transitional outcomes that are required to create a foundation for socio-economic engagement.

The Agile focus on learning and innovation has been a success. In just one year, the national project has supported collaborators to embed new ideas and practices into their program models and wider organizations. They have strengthened and enhanced new capacities and practices aimed at improving skills alignment and employment training outcomes. Moreover, each collaborator has done this in a unique way by building on pre-existing strengths and by adapting these new approaches to specific local opportunities and challenges.

Collaborators remarked on how powerful and productive the opportunity has been, given how stretched for time they usually are in their day-to-day activities. Not only did they integrate key aspects of the YWCA BSF model such as asset mapping, strengths-based client engagement/one-to-one practice, and employer engagement and bridging activities; they also adapted additional design elements, including more holistic delivery models, longer-term client engagement to build livelihoods, and a stronger focus on enhancing participants' self-motivation and leadership skills.

They have also continued to develop and share their expertise in trades/sectoral programming, coaching (for example, the use of participant journaling as a strategy for documenting and reflecting on personal change, and at the same time for practicing essential skills); and the use of social media and new technologies. Collaborators are increasingly looking to Internet Technology (IT) and social media to support them to meet their educational and operational objectives. The use of technology has also further improved communication among and effectiveness of staff.

Collaborators have made strong efforts to embed client advocacy into their work, to help build the foundation necessary for underserved people to participate in essential skills programming. Staff are aware of how extremely hard it is for marginalized populations to navigate complex bureaucratic systems and services: the process often requires time, patience, self-confidence, persistence and relevant language skills, as well as familiarity with and access to a computer.

*“We have lots of client advocacy issues. We’re in the process of looking to find funding for a Navigator to help women navigate the system—even EI assumes that you have access to a computer to sign up. We get lots of walk-ins—people looking for support and problem solving. Staff in this role can build participants’ capacity and knowledge.”*

**YWCA MONCTON** staff



All collaborators, but especially those working with groups more distant from the labour market, expressed their distress about the major systemic challenges to participation faced by their program populations.

*“Empowerment is a challenge. It’s easy to inspire students, but most go back to stressful environments. They’re still living with their issues: substance abuse, gambling, unhealthy relationships, literacy and the legacy of residential schools, which is still causing issues with parenting, religion, identity, attitudes toward schooling. Truth and Reconciliation taught in classrooms is something to look forward to.”*

**YWCA THOMPSON** staff

*“You wouldn’t think you’re in Canada. Minimum needs are not met.... We see trauma 24/7. Motivation is low. Many in foster homes missed out.... A high school burned down.... Kids aren’t consistently educated. We have to convince people in this city: many people still don’t see women’s issues as a priority.”*

**YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT** staff

## 4.2 ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLABORATOR PROGRAMS, CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE: 2017-2018

Since completion of the 2015-2016 pilot phase, all collaborators have remained committed to participating in our national knowledge exchange. They have continued to draw on collective learning about the YWCA BSF model in order to adapt and enhance their programs and practices, and many have been able to carry on offering their adapted models beyond the pilot phase.

Collaborators have reported how the project has continued to inspire them to cultivate new employer and community connections. Even though some staff are in precarious employment situations themselves, they remain dedicated to keeping their programs afloat and being anchors in their organizations and communities.

The 2017-2018 phase of the project has focused on:

- continued adaptation and refinement of the collaborator models and curricula, and integration of promising essential skills practices with their participants;
- promoting new and enhanced ways to build the sustainability of programs and organizational capacity that include employer and community connections; and
- the sharing of knowledge with the Learning Community and the broader public through this Compendium and the Toolkit, as well as through a dissemination plan that included events, forums, training delivery and other strategies to build essential skills training capacity across the country.

Some collaborators with smaller capacity were stretched to complete all of the project activities. In response, the YWCA ESE team facilitated a flexible process tailored to each collaborator, so that all could contribute their learning, deliverables and perspectives to the national collaborative.

All collaborators have participated in the dissemination process, at national and regional levels as well as within their Associations and communities. Learning was shared with over 50 other organizations interested in integrating a holistic, asset-based approach into their work. This number includes entities such as the Province of Nova Scotia, the Adult Literacy Provincial Forum in Manitoba and Saskatoon, and the Greater Toronto Employment and Training Programs Networks. Partnerships are emerging from coast to coast, such as the St John's Centre for Community Partners and the British Columbia Research Centre for Development.

The Learning Community now consists of over 280 non-profit, private and public sector entities, without counting the many individual participants and alumnae who are actively involved. It is stimulating an inclusive, participatory knowledge exchange about the need for a collective approach to respond to the complex socio-economic issues facing Canada's diverse regions.

Through their dissemination plans and other communications with YWCA Toronto's ESE team, collaborators have also shared learning about the impact of the project at a community level. Below is a brief sampling of their updated highlights.

#### 4.2.1 COLLABORATOR PROGRAM MODELS

Although YWCA Halifax experienced delays to pilot funding for the project, it managed to deliver two separate programs and collect data by summer 2017. Staff are still drawing on the YWCA BSF model and routinely incorporate the integrated essential skills training approach into their programs, despite the changing conditions. They have also increased the amount of one-to-one support they provide to participants, in order to build their client focus, and have continued to use asset mapping to identify strengths and areas of improvement.

YWCA Hamilton was another strong and experienced collaborator that lost the funding to launch its planned pilot, but in 2017 offered and documented two pilots for the project: its Pre-Apprenticeship program and its Women's Entrepreneurship program. Staff are continuing to adapt the YWCA BSF model and build an asset-based approach into all of their Employment and Training services. As one staff member noted, it helps participants to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and plan for the positive changes that involvement in such programs can provide. Two trained apprentice graduates have since come back to address and mentor participants, and one graduate who is a newcomer to Canada has found gainful employment through that program and is now the sole supporter of her family. The Women's Entrepreneurship program is still in development, but ten out of 13 women's small businesses are up and running and in their third year. Two are located in brick-and-mortar premises, and one woman bought a landscaping business.

Since the pilot delivery phase, YWCA Metro Vancouver has enhanced its professional and leadership development strategies, for example by inviting past participants to become mentors in order to promote social connections and support for current program participants. Focus@Work has also refined its participant engagement strategy to become more accessible to immigrant community groups and to staff, participants and the broader community through the online communications tool, Slack. This platform for team communication allows participants and staff to post messages, questions, trainings, job postings, and community events. The platform has also supported the growth of networks connecting current program participants with alumnae. Staff continue to build relationships and leverage their own networks to bring in guest speakers. If participants are still unemployed after the 12 weeks of the program, they can attend guest speaker events and maintain access to the Slack platform. If a woman's career is interrupted for whatever reason, she can come back and explore new opportunities rather than starting at zero. Closer participant follow-up also enables program staff to keep better track of what kinds of jobs are available in the changing local economy.

YWCA Moncton's pilot participants had expressed a need for more and continued focus on employment, and most urgently on pre-employment readiness. As part of its client focus, the program now focuses on providing customized one-to-one support for women prior to their setting employment goals. Staff recognized that their organizational strength is in working with women individually and providing them with supports to address issues such as self-esteem and trauma, in order to enable them to pursue employment goals over the long term. The program continues to draw on its strong partnerships within the community to address the specific needs and goals of participants—for example, by working with organizations that can provide placements and training.

YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region continues to offer the Power of Trades/Puissance des Métiers program in English and French, and has made some important enhancements since the pilot ended. Staff have increased the participation of program graduates and trades employers as guest speakers at the beginning of the program in order to maximize their impact/positive influence on participants early on, and ensure program retention and motivation throughout the six-week program. Managing participant expectations has always been a challenge for this program, which is focused on new immigrants to Canada. Staff have now created a job board/binder and share postings with participants on a daily/weekly basis, highlighting the key differences between entry-level and higher-level positions, as well as key requirements of specific jobs, in order to help participants set realistic goals and expectations. Staff also meet three times a year to discuss strategic planning and refine the program curriculum for specific cohorts.

Although YWCA Saskatoon's sectoral pilot, Essential Skills for the Hospitality Industry program, is no longer offered, staff now integrate all five components of the YWCA BSF model into their existing and new programs, including the pre-apprenticeship Trade Journeys and Job Search programs. In 2018, staff adopted the lesson plan format from the YWCA BSF model and adapted it for its new pre-apprenticeship Trade Journey program, and supported participants in developing an action plan specifically for their work experience. In April 2018, YWCA Saskatoon Employment and Learning Centre staff attended the Contact Conference: an annual, two-day conference for career practitioners, educators, school counsellors, and human resources professionals to learn about labour market trends, explore new career development tools and resources, and hear from world-renowned experts. YWCA Saskatoon was a Contact Conference Exhibitor and also participated in networking with other practitioners. Staff shared information about the YWCA BSF model, noting the positive feedback that it received. They had requests from many attendees who were interested in joining the Learning Community, and receiving updates and communications about both the model and learning events.

YWCA Thompson's Steps to Success program continues to work with participants on a one-to-one basis through an asset-based approach and tools adapted for its predominantly Indigenous participants and its culturally customized supports, including: field trips; opportunities to participate in First Nations ceremonies to connect/reconnect with culture; and culturally appropriate curriculum materials and guest trainers, many of them First Nations. All these elements have contributed to the effectiveness of the program and facilitate a process of learning, community building and empowerment.

## 4.2.2 CAPACITY BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

YWCA Agvvik Nunavut collaborated as an Association with limited capacity, delivering its Sewing to Success program through its women's shelters in a precarious community facing huge systemic issues. In spite of all these challenges, Sewing to Success has built capacity through its own new Sewing Room: a safe space for the women, who continue to explore economic opportunities to show and/or sell the pieces they have created through the program. More community speakers are being invited in to share knowledge and engage participants in learning about Inuit culture, and staff continue to pursue a formal partnership with Arctic College in Iqaluit as well as connections with community partners and other service providers. The needs, however, remain immense. At the 2018 Vancouver national forum to wrap up the project research, this collaborator stressed how the picture cannot improve substantially for Inuit communities until the larger patterns of systemic political and socio-economic injustice are addressed at a comprehensive level.

YWCA Halifax continues to remain resilient, offering employment and training programs and building their partnerships, including those with employers and community partners. The Coordinator has made it a current practice to meet with each employer one-to-one to identify how programs could be improved, and to inform employers in more detail about individual participant goals in order to support improved work experiences.

YWCA Hamilton continues to build strategic partnerships and share learning about capacity building from the YWCA BSF model within the local community. Staff mentioned how the asset-based approach is also helping them to explore new efficiencies and capacities within their overall Association. YWCA Hamilton gave a presentation to the Hamilton Network of Employment and Training Providers in August 2018, at which they shared learning about the national project. They also showed how they have adapted components of the YWCA BSF model into their programs. This forum attracted a lot of interest and attendees are waiting to learn more about the project findings.

YWCA Metro Vancouver staff noted how the pilot capacity building asset mapping process supported them to find new efficiencies in their time and resources for delivering their Focus@Work program. The Program/Organizational Capacity Building Asset Mapping tool has now been integrated into program staff so that they may reflect on how to build capacity in their current programming, and in the broader Association. They have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of staff deployment and instituted a Career Advisor role in the program to streamline service and ensure that participants who finished the program gain more support to become self-directed. They also stressed how eager their alumnae are to support the program by getting involved as guest speakers, mentors and job connections. These capacity building aspects of the program have become more formalized through the project.

YWCA Moncton has continued to communicate to its community how its program in Saint John can fill gaps and add value for all service providers, as well as for the women participants. Staff have been referring those women interested in seeking employment to other community providers for employment and placement training. Staff are also continuing to draw on the YWCA BSF model and are reviewing how it might be adapted into future programs.

YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region has a reputation for its specialized soft skills and pre-employment essential skills training expertise with newcomers in skilled trades. It has been approached more recently to offer programming to other groups, including youth and Indigenous populations, as well as to other partner organizations such as the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE). It has drawn on its train the trainers training, provided to staff by YWCA Toronto in June 2017, to deliver more tailored pre-employment and essential skills programming. In November 2017, two staff applied their new skills by creating and delivering tailored pre-employment and essential skills programming to group participants in the Wood Manufacturing Council's Wood Employee Readiness Curriculum (WERC) in Ottawa. The Wood Manufacturing Council has asked the staff to deliver the training again to future cohorts.

YWCA Saskatoon's new Trade Journeys program has maintained its network of employers in the hospitality sector that support the Association's work and provide employment opportunities to participants in this and other employment training programs. YWCA Saskatoon has also embedded current labour market information into the program, which is updated through regular check-ins with employers regarding employment opportunities and what specific skills are required for hospitality jobs. It further keeps current with new learning in other organizations' employment programs through networking, activities and conferences. YWCA Saskatoon staff are now acting as advocates for Life Skills and leadership development after YWCA Toronto provided train the trainers Life Skills Coach training in 2017, which enhanced their facilitation skills for working with groups. YWCA Saskatoon is currently working with one of its talented program participants who had a concept for a mobile application (that will be available through Google, Apple and Amazon) through which participants can create their own miniature resumes and calling cards so that they can network on the go.



YWCA Thompson continues to focus on supporting primarily rural Indigenous communities, and remains an advocate for teaching the nine essential skills for the workplace within the Province of Manitoba. It has been a strong partner in Life Skills training, incorporating a Life Skills and strength-based approach to all of its work, even though staff still struggle to meet the critical needs of their participants and to extend services to other still more remote communities in northern Manitoba. With the support of YWCA Toronto training, Thompson staff have increased their focus on and expertise in building leadership skills. Rather than incorporating an employer engagement component into their Steps to Success program, their strategy is to bring this training into their community to build the overall capacity of participants, staff and community members. They continue to enhance their strong connections in the community, working with local Friendship Centres and the Canadian Mental Health Association in Thompson.

YWCA Thompson has been instrumental in knowledge exchange about this national project through the connections built with other organizations and projects across Manitoba. In 2017, YWCA Toronto and Thompson staff presented the YWCA BSF model at the Manitoba Adult Literacy Conference, an event for regional service providers in Winnipeg that attracted interest across Manitoba, and has created a workshop on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach and asset mapping processes.



# SECTION 5:

## Reflections on Learning from the Project



## OVERVIEW

The five-year national project has been a great learning experience for YWCA Toronto. We did not expect that so many individuals, organizations, employers and other community partners would be interested in investing with us to research the potential of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model to build a more skilled and inclusive workforce. The challenges our Collaborative faced along the way were a major part of the learning process, and in many respects as important to document as the project's positive outcomes. These challenges appear to reflect two key themes: the extent and complexity of underserved populations' essential skills training needs in today's socio-economy; and the uncertain funding context that can threaten the capacity even of larger non-profit organizations to sustain and innovate to keep pace with new labour market and demographic trends across the regions of Canada. Below, we explore some of our learning.

### 5.1 LEARNING FROM A COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

In keeping with our community economic development (CED) approach, we designed the research project as a respectful, participatory knowledge exchange process involving a broad range of stakeholders in our learning community, from individual program participants and alumnae at the nine pan-Canadian sites to collaborator staff, all the way to our many employer and community partners, and to the Government of Canada. This process was complex, time-consuming and demanding. We had to work across different time zones, and with some collaborator Associations that were experiencing a lack of resources, such as insufficient staffing and/or staff turnover. New staff faced a steep learning curve to catch up with the approach and requirements of the project. For our part, although we had over ten years of learning about incubating our asset-based model through the YWCA Skills Development Centre (SDC), we had to adapt our strategies from a local context to a national level and incorporate the input of other practitioners in very different demographic locations across Canada.

We were also working with widely varying capacities of collaborator programs, and differing local contexts. The assumption was that each collaborator had an employment training program already in place that they could adapt for the project. Yet, as the project unfolded, four out of our nine sites were set back by the unstable context of community-based programs: their funding for the pilots was in jeopardy. YWCA Toronto and our collaborators had to be dedicated, tenacious and agile in response to sudden changes in program funding, staff turnover, and other issues and constraints over the course of the project. Clearly the evidence from this project suggests that it will be important to create more sustainable project infrastructures in order to support emerging CED research initiatives such as this one.

### 5.2 LEARNING ABOUT AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

Many of the participants who took part in the project live in highly precarious socio-economic circumstances and may struggle simply to engage and sustain their participation in foundational skills-building programs, let alone participate in mainstream employment. With a limited timeframe and resources, we had to be realistic about the outcomes of the programs that were incubated and documented for the project. In so short a period of delivery, they could not be expected to produce major, transformative outcomes in people's lives. They did, however, confirm the experience of YWCA Toronto: that involvement in asset-based programs can support participants to build the hope, confidence and resilience to make positive steps toward a future and to engaging in longer-term learning.

All collaborators noted striking progress in the confidence and motivation of participants as they were supported to take an asset-based approach to their lives. People from all demographic groups reported positively on the value of starting with their strengths rather than their deficits, and of learning how to examine and reflect on these strengths and feel encouraged to explore new possibilities.



Core to the YWCA BSF model is the foundational skills training component. It appears to build hope, self-confidence, self-direction and resilience at individual, program/organizational and community levels. Integrating such foundational training with individualized pathways to success has been a highly effective practice.

Learning from the national project has confirmed that programs invest time and resources on three key interconnected asset-building objectives that support participants to advance:

- **Conditions for participation**—growing a base of stability and resilience that can sustain people’s ability to participate in programming and in the socio-economy.
- **Capacity to engage**—developing a set of soft skills and competences that support self-direction and independence. These key ingredients include: assertiveness, self-confidence, problem solving, self-advocacy, action planning, and the ability to navigate complex systems.
- **Job-readiness**—alignment of essential skills with labour market demands and specific types of employment.

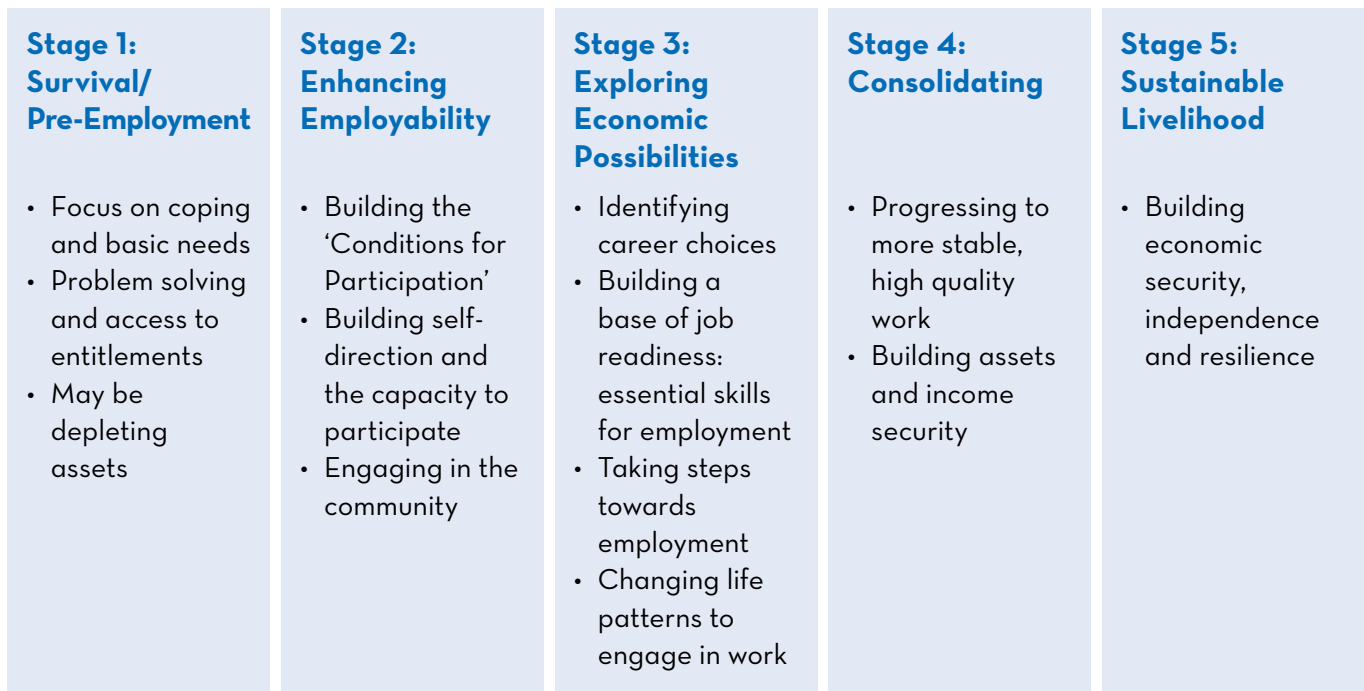
Foundational work begins at the early stages with marginalized individuals, but remains vital to support them on an ongoing basis as they move toward their goals. Its importance is still not sufficiently understood and/or recognized beyond the non-profit sector, which is why our learning partnerships with employers and government are so crucial. Our experience as practitioners suggests that an investment in foundational skills training will build stronger, more equitable communities in the long term.

### 5.3 LEARNING ABOUT DEMOGRAPHIC POPULATIONS

Collaborators have shown through their regionally adapted programs and promising practices tailored to the needs and goals of their populations that the asset-based model can be adapted flexibly to a broad diversity of needs, skills levels and employment/life goals, as well as to a wide range of local contexts.

For one example, from YWCA Agvvik Nunavut, see below.

Figure 20: The Sustainable Livelihoods Continuum (with permission of Sustainable Livelihoods Canada)



While a strong case emerged from the project research for gender-focused and culturally appropriate programming, we also learned that specific demographic populations are not necessarily homogeneous in their needs and interests; and in turn, that many underserved individuals share challenges to participation in the labour market that cut across demographic groups.

An individual's stage of engagement along the Sustainable Livelihoods continuum (see above, **Figure 20**), seemed to have as much influence on their transitional outcomes as did their demographic population. Some collaborators also noted the positive results of blended demographic groups: they shared and learned a great deal from each other during the course of the programs.

It appears, across the board, that programs have to be tailored to their participants, and even to each cohort moving through the program, rather than categorizing them as a target group. For example, the asset mapping process seemed to resonate with and engage some participant groups more than others. Most women-only and Indigenous groups were quick to identify with the process as a way to explore their strengths as whole individuals. Asset mapping takes time, however, on the part of both participants and program staff. Collaborators from National Capital Region and Saskatoon noted that some of their participants were less interested in exploring personal assets and were more focused simply on finding employment. It will be important to experiment further to see how the mapping tools and processes can be adapted for use with specific audiences.

## ASSET-BASED PROMISING PRACTICES: YWCA AGVVIK NUNAVUT, SEWING TO SUCCESS

### **Informal Mentoring During Sewing Sessions**

**Informal mentoring is unstructured participant-to-participant teaching during the sewing skills sessions that we lead as part of the Sewing to Success program.**

#### **How is it done?**

During sewing sessions, the facilitator introduces the sewing skill. Participants are asked about their proficiency in the skill. Those with some level of proficiency are partnered with another participant who is a novice or who has a lower level of proficiency. Partners work with each other to master the skill during the sewing session. The Elder and the Elder facilitator floats between partners to facilitate in the teaching of the skill as well as to address any other concerns that come up during partner work.

#### **Why Informal Mentoring?**

Informal mentoring helps to improve on communication, collaboration and creativity. It also facilitates the development of problem-solving skills. In particular, it is a productive method in which women can build their self-confidence and pass on traditional skills. Informal mentoring supports women participating in the program to go beyond career development skills and encourages them to work on their own personal development. Informal mentoring is not meant to be measured. We are simply using it as a tool for personal development and to involve the women in active learning of sewing skills.



## 5.4 PROMOTING NEW WAYS TO BUILD CAPACITY

The project research process itself required a considerable investment of time and effort on the part of collaborator staff stretched by their day-to-day activities as practitioners to keep up with their participants' basic needs. As one collaborator put it:

*“Lots of advocacy is needed—to show funders how we’re having to spend so much time supporting women to access services without which they can’t retain sustainable employment.”*

**YWCA MONCTON** Staff

Collaborators have nonetheless reported that the learning from the project has shifted their thinking to a more sustainable approach. A key lesson that has resonated within the Collaborative is the value of becoming more intentional in all areas of programming. An asset-based approach to capacity building has encouraged collaborators to reflect on their internal processes and to design community engagement strategies that can promote sustainability of programs. This holistic perspective has also supported them to work with participants not only to build essential skills needed in today's labour market but also to enhance the assets required to reduce isolation and promote general well-being.

Many collaborators expressed to us how the knowledge exchange from a national community of learning has built their capacity:

- to keep their participants at the forefront and involve them in all areas of programming, in order for everyone to have a voice in social change;
- to collect a broader range of evidence-based quantitative and qualitative data that show the impact of their programs; and
- to advocate across organizations and communities for partnerships that will invest in building more sustainable programs, in order promote a skilled and inclusive workforce.

All collaborators found the capacity mapping process very useful, and documented valuable insights from applying a holistic strength-based lens to the delivery of their programs. They started to find new efficiencies, became more entrepreneurial in their approach, and made new community connections.

Asset-based thinking and related strategies appear to provide cost-effective solutions for large and small organizations. While smaller organizations may not have the resources to fund their own holistic hub structure, they can still promote wrap-around approaches that can be adopted by individual staff, and that enable programs to leverage a broader range of additional supports and services. They can strengthen their community and referral networks by engagement in intentional partnership building, and thereby raise their leadership profile in their community. As shown through the national research, more specialized sectoral employment approaches also appear effective in supporting programs to build strategic working relationships with employers and other key stakeholders (e.g. industry councils), providing them with current information about the local labour market and connecting participants to work that fits their needs, talents and goals. Such substantive, reciprocal networks of learning and support among non-profit, private and public sectors will be crucial in order to include all demographic groups in a knowledge-based socio-economy.

Project-based funding nonetheless remains a major issue, hampering the sustainability, continuity and to some extent the effectiveness of programs. The experience of some collaborators was that they suddenly had to start again at zero after losing program funding. Strict funder guidelines were also mentioned as limiting programs' financial and other resources to support participants' needs, especially in the case of those most distant from the labour market.

## 5.5 CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

The many program models, curricula, lesson plans and promising practices that emerged from this pilot project have shown the promise of building a community of shared knowledge exchange to enhance the capacity of our sector. Through the five-year course of the project, however, many collaborators experienced staff turnover that has resulted in gaps in program/organizational memory and expertise, requiring new staff to catch up while already pressed for time in their daily program activities with participants. Through approaches such as the

Learning Community, it may be possible to build a bank of collective resources that practitioners can draw on to devise their own adapted strategies for building program capacity, responding to complex socio-economic issues and growing collaborative partnerships. We can also continue to exchange learning about documentation tools and processes that can help us make an evidence-based case for further investment in essential skills training, to contribute to building greater socio-economic opportunities for all.



Guests contribute to a roundtable discussion at a YWCA Toronto Building Sustainable Futures Learning Event in May 2017.

# SECTION 6: Moving Forward



## OVERVIEW

YWCA Toronto's experience of working with women is predicated on the view that women are subject matter experts in many areas related to marginalization. This national project has inspired us to learn and share more about how the gendered patterns of women's marginalization can become a platform for examining and breaking down the silos of institutionalized discrimination and socio-economic marginalization experienced by other groups. It has also provided a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange about promising essential skills models and practices across Canada, to improve the employment and livelihood opportunities of those distant from the labour market.

As we continue to expand this cross-pollination of learning, however, we have documented evidence from the project to show that there is a clear case for gender- and equity-focused programs that offer safe, respectful spaces for those who cannot always be fighting to be heard. Although many features of marginalization intersect among the program participants who took part in the research, the choice between such specialized essential skills programs and blended learning environments is not an either/or proposition. Both are urgently needed if we are to build a skilled and inclusive workforce, and a more equitable society.

Below are some recommendations moving forward:

## 6.1 CONTINUE TO BUILD AN EVIDENCE-BASED CASE FOR GREATER INVESTMENT IN HOLISTIC FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS BUILDING PROGRAMS

Simply to promote jobs for everyone is not an effective solution, just as failure to distinguish job readiness from employability means that people may be placed in jobs they are unable to retain. Setbacks arising from weak foundational skills and/or job loss only further deplete people's resilience and hope for a better future—qualities that are essential for navigating the evolving employment landscape. People need a base of foundational capacity (pre-employment skills, self-confidence, resilience and autonomy) to participate in the economy as well as the conditions (such as basic needs, housing, healthcare, child/eldercare, etc.) of participation.

After implementing the program/organizational capacity building tool and tracking tools designed for this project, some collaborators were able to identify far more clearly the amount of staff time and program resources they were devoting to support their most destabilized participants through the early stages of foundation building. They were working simultaneously on both people's conditions for participation in the socio-economy and their capacity to participate. The individual participant research showed how vital this holistic focused support is for people to build the strength to stay in and advance in skills training programs, and to move forward with their goals. Without a strong base, they can easily cycle backwards. Collaborators shared how much of this difficult early stage asset-building work is often unrecognized and un/under-funded.

Quantitative and qualitative evidence from the project bolsters the case for longer-term, more coordinated and substantial public and private sector partnerships to fund and otherwise support these early stages of livelihood progress. We hope that the learning and tools developed to capture the outcomes of this project can contribute to building a stronger case for a sustained community investment in foundational skills training for underserved people.



## 6.2 PROMOTE AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

As we have learned from in-house experience and from the national project, a focus on people's deficits and a traditional siloed approach to essential skills training perpetuate the very issues that have distanced them from employment. An asset-based approach, such as that of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model, is grounded in building hope, confidence and resilience as a prerequisite to moving forward. The model encourages everyone to be proactive in investing in their own futures through continuous improvement of their skills for employment and livelihood success. This approach has now been tested with individual participants in a wide range of communities, and with collaborator staff to support them to reflect on their program/organizational strengths and areas of potential improvement in program delivery. It is accessible, respectful and practical, and can be adapted to any group, organization or community.

## 6.3 KEEP A FOCUS ON EQUITY AND GENDER

Gender provides a powerful lens for understanding the factors that create and perpetuate many often-intersectional forms of inequity, and for identifying strategies to support all people to move from vulnerability toward stronger futures.

Especially at the foundational stage, gender-focused programs can be transformative. We have heard from women participants whose needs have not been met by other programs that our gendered approach has been key in providing a vital entry point for change, supporting them forward from situations of violence, poverty, past setbacks and on to their career and life goals.

In the national project, our collaborators, working with Indigenous populations, immigrants and low-income women and youth—many of whom have experienced and/or are experiencing trauma in their lives—emphasized the importance of safe space and a gendered and culturally appropriate approach to programming. A focus on gender and equity at a policy level remains crucial. Through these specialized programs, we can create safe spaces for learning, self-expression and skills development that provide people with opportunities to make their own pathways to success.

## 6.4 CREATE AND NURTURE PARTNERSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS

YWCA Toronto's investment in an employer engagement strategy shows much promise. It has provided training, mentoring and placement opportunities for participants, while employers have reported benefiting from our expertise and from the professional, talented graduates of our programs. It has also given employers a chance to learn more about the women who come to us. At our employer events, women have been able to share their stories and offer their advice about how we can work together to fast track a transition to economic stability and career advancement. Employers have been able to offer practical tips, networking suggestions, and connections to support them in pathways forward. Employers have further helped YWCA Toronto by being our champions to the business community and spreading the word about our work with women.

Employer engagement has also been an important part of the national initiative with collaborators: the project has supported them to enhance their existing networks and outreach to new employers in their communities. The non-profit sector needs to cultivate these champions proactively in order to help sustain and enhance essential skills programs, and as a national strategy for building a skilled and inclusive workforce.



## 6.5 TAKE AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH TO COLLECTIVE CHALLENGES

The experience of piloting a national project has reinforced YWCA Toronto's prior learning that the socio-economic issues faced by underserved people require the engagement of our whole community. If we do not respond together, many more people will be left behind, their talent will be lost, and the gap between low- and high-income strata in our society will widen further.

This research initiative was ambitious in pursuing a strategy to build strength at all levels. It was an experiment for the hundreds of people who participated in the project: individuals, collaborators, employer and community partners and, last but not least, our funder. A great lesson learned was how much more knowledge we can gain and exchange by including everyone's voices in the process. The non-profit sector plays a crucial role in creating an equitable and inclusive society. The sector is mission driven to pursue its social goals, and is instrumental in advocating for equitable social service systems. Leaders and champions in the field give generously of their time and expertise, despite the realities of limited resources and funding stability. It will be vital for the sector to get on board more leaders and champions from the public and private sectors who can help nurture our field of practice and advocate for our mission.

We must also cultivate more entrepreneurial strategies. The YWCA BSF model's menu of free and fee-for-service programs is designed to build participants' independence and self-determination as well as the courage to take calculated risks in a supportive environment, in order to prepare for, enter and advance in the labour market. If non-profit organizations are to keep pace with the changing needs of our communities, we must continue to be as innovative as we seek new ways to generate income and promote our programs.

## 6.6 ADVOCATE FOR SKILLS BUILDING AS A COMMUNITY ASSET

Many people have a long road to travel in order to address factors that continue to affect their skills and education, mental and physical health, identity, and ability to engage in employment. As collaborator staff have noted, it can take some people years of support to achieve small steps forward. Nonetheless, both longitudinal and anecdotal evidence from project participants and collaborators suggests that for individuals taking their first steps toward employment, an asset-based, participant-focused model appears to stimulate improvements in a holistic range of asset areas that have a positive impact on health, self-care, reliance on social benefits, etc.—all of which reduce costs to them and their families, employers, government and the broader community.

It was beyond the scope of this project to measure the collaborator programs' Social Return on Investment. The learning has confirmed, however, that investing in essential skills training with all people—even with those who may never be ready to enter mainstream employment—can support them to build on their skills and improve their well-being, and to contribute to their communities.

Participants noted how the positive impact of greater self-confidence and resilience, identification of existing skills and strengths, and learning new skills radiates beyond the individual. For people who suffer from generational trauma, this change was mentioned by collaborator staff and by the individuals themselves as being especially important. Many participants also mentioned how they wanted to share their stories of change, to motivate others and to promote better understanding among people who have not experienced their life circumstances. Past and present participants continue to contribute their assets to the community through activities such as volunteering, speaking at events, mentoring, and offering peer support.

# CONCLUSION

This national project has helped to provide a clearer picture of the needs and interests of underserved populations across Canada as they seek to build economic security and more meaningful levels of engagement in their respective communities. It has also confirmed that the non-profit sector works in a precarious funding environment that can undermine the sustainability of even well-established essential skills programs.

A key theme repeated by this collaborative is how rapidly the world of work keeps changing. It requires a broader and more flexible definition of essential skills that includes proactive new competencies that are not quickly or easily acquired by underserved job seekers. Indeed, it demands a high level of self-confidence, persistence, flexibility and self-direction in anyone seeking to find, retain and advance in their job. The new economy leaves many highly qualified people struggling as it increasingly generates contingent employment that cannot offer a living wage, quality work and opportunities for advancement. The automation of many industrial sectors will shrink further the pool of available jobs, even for technically skilled workers. In this context, a siloed program approach to essential skills training will not be sufficiently agile to meet employers' shifting demands.

In the future, a stronger focus on assets at the front end of employment program supports might prevent people from having to go through cycles of rejection and failure in our employment systems. Programs will also need to offer more integrated and sophisticated pathways for continuous upgrading and learning— from foundational skills and the soft skills necessary to succeed in today's workforce, to professional and leadership opportunities.

The non-profit sector can also explore new ways of communicating to private and public sectors about the value of investing in foundational programs, even if outcomes take longer to achieve and to become internalized as first steps toward a stronger livelihood. Further knowledge exchange may help to stimulate and grow funding partnerships and models that can create a novel form of industry, so that non-profit organizations are not constantly set back by unstable revenue.

YWCA Toronto will continue working to engage more individuals, practitioners, employers, organizations and the broader community in finding collective solutions to socio-economic challenges. It is not just a matter of people and programs adapting to the changing economy: employers must also see the importance of adapting along with their changing communities.

Sustained, coordinated investment to provide solid employment and learning opportunities may greatly reduce the number of people on the margins of our socio-economy. While the case can be made that this will result in higher productivity and lower costs to government services, there is a more powerful argument for inclusion: that our community will be the poorer until each person can contribute to it their unique assets.

## JOIN THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES COMMUNITY

Please join this vibrant learning community that is contributing to building a skilled and inclusive workforce across Canada. Sign-up to receive free updates, invitations to events, and notices of opportunities for involvement in the project. Share your innovative ideas and suggestions, and collaborate with us!

Please complete the form below and email it to [buildingfutures@ywcatoronto.org](mailto:buildingfutures@ywcatoronto.org) or subscribe online at [www.ywcatoronto.org/buildingfutures](http://www.ywcatoronto.org/buildingfutures).

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First Name	
Last Name	
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Position / Role	
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Province / Territory	
<p><b>Ways to Get Involved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participating in one or more of our components</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing a product or service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hire, mentor, train, sponsor, partner and/or collaborate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a placement or train your new team</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subscribe to our mailing list for exclusive news and views</li> </ul>	

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1:

### OVERVIEW OF KEY SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACING UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS ACROSS CANADA

In the summer of 2018, the Federal Government released Canada's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, setting a reduction target of 20% by 2020 and 50% by 2030. It also introduced an Official Poverty Line "based on the cost of a basket of goods and services that individuals and families require to meet their basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living in communities across the country." The strategy offers a more holistic understanding of poverty that includes issues such as housing, food insecurity, and health and disability. Poverty is defined as: "The condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society" (Employment and Social Development Canada).

The strategy is based on three pillars:

- **Dignity:** lifting Canadians out of poverty by ensuring basic needs—such as safe and affordable housing, healthy food and health care—are met.
- **Opportunity and Inclusion:** helping Canadians join the middle class by promoting full participation in society and equality of opportunity.
- **Resilience and Security:** supporting the middle class by protecting Canadians from falling into poverty, and by supporting income security and resilience.

This understanding of the many dimensions of poverty and of the need for a holistic approach to moving people toward sustainable futures is not new to practitioners in the field of poverty reduction such as YWCA Toronto.

We have learned from our own experience and from our research that populations across Canada—including low-income women and Indigenous, rural and remote, and urban new immigrant communities—

face an array of challenges to gaining economic security and full participation in society. They often experience a history of un/under-employment due to complex intersectional factors such as: poverty, social isolation, abuse/violence, single parenting, lower employment and literacy skills, health-related issues (both diagnosed and undiagnosed; recently we have been seen an increase in mental health and related literacy issues), lack of safe and affordable housing, childcare issues (particularly for those who are moving out of dependency), settlement issues (for newcomers), lack of recognition for credentials (for internationally educated professionals), and/or weak links to a competitive labour market.

The current economic climate, rising growth of precarious employment, and the lightning pace of technological change present even more challenges for underserved people than for more privileged Canadians. In the case of low-income women, they are over-represented in the growing sector of precarious employment.

Women living with/at risk of violence are more likely to experience unemployment, precarious employment and lower incomes. They are more likely to be on social assistance and to have mental health issues. Meanwhile, immigrant and racialized women are more likely to be in low-paid, low-skilled and precarious employment (Premji). Practitioners in the field of women's employment programming make a strong case for gender-focused programs in spaces where women, especially those who have experienced or are at-risk of violence, can feel safe to become empowered through life skills training that improves their self-esteem and self-perception as a vital foundation for exploring new employment-related opportunities (Ministry of The Status of Women; Lewchuk, et al.; Lloyd; Premi).

Intersectional challenges such as age, race, trauma, poverty and cultural dislocation often hamper people in their efforts to access training and sustainable, fulfilling employment. Although driven to move on

and bring their diverse strengths to the Canadian economy, many need academic upgrading, bridging training and up-skilling, especially in digital literacy. For many, it may be very difficult to move into burgeoning sectors such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and IT (Ministry of The Status of Women; Lewchuk, et al.; Lloyd; Premi). Meanwhile, there is a serious shortfall in basic skills training within Canada's workforce:

"According to the Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), in 2011, the literacy skills of 42 per cent of working-aged Canadians do not meet the bare minimum required by most of the jobs being created in the economy. This minimum level is also the level needed to learn and to use what has been read in new and different situations" (Lane and Murray).

This issue is especially pressing for youth in the changing economic landscape. According to a 2018 Royal Bank of Canada study: "We discovered that the four million Canadian youth entering the workforce over the next decade are going to need a foundation of skills that sets them up for many different jobs and roles rather than a single career path. They will need a portfolio of human skills such as critical thinking, social perceptiveness, and complex problem solving to remain competitive and resilient in the labour market. More than a quarter of Canadian jobs will be heavily disrupted by automation in the next decade, and half will require a new mix of skills even if the job title stays the same. That doesn't mean those jobs are going away. The Canadian economy will create 2.4-million new jobs between now and 2021—but almost all of them will require a different approach. The economy will be built on a mobile workforce, constantly learning, training and upgrading to meet the demands of a changing world" (Royal Bank of Canada).

*Getting Left Behind*, the third report in United Way and McMaster University's PEPSO series, examined "who gained and who lost as the labour market improved between 2011 and 2017." The report finds that: "precarious employment has become imprinted on our labour market and the rising tide of economic

growth did not lift all boats. When it comes to landing a secure job in a growing economy, a combination of gender, race and having a university degree determine whether or not you'll get left behind. It concludes with a call for all sectors to take action and ensure that no one gets left behind. Recommendations include expanding decent work through employment standards and ladders to opportunity, creating a floor of basic income and social supports available to precarious workers, and ensuring that background and circumstances are not a barrier to the labour market" (Lewchuk, et al.)

If this economic reality is challenging in general for youth, it can be far more so for disadvantaged youth—including Indigenous and immigrant youth—and for many mature workers and immigrants new to Canada. In the case of mature people, "[t]hese barriers can take the form of overt discrimination, such as not hiring somebody simply because of his/her age, or more subtle or systemic discrimination, such as eliminating someone because of a perception that he/she lacks career potential... Examples of unequal treatment because of age on the job include, but are not limited to:

- Limiting or withholding employment opportunities including transfer, promotion and training opportunities;
- Not assigning an older worker to certain tasks or projecting or subjecting an older worker to an unwanted transfer because of age;
- Performance management of older workers in a different way than other workers (i.e. subjecting performance to a higher level of scrutiny); and
- Not recalling someone from lay-off because of age" (Dinsdale).

Mature workers can also experience issues of outdated and/or a lack of current workplace essential skills. They may also face challenges in literacy, and familiarity with technology, workplace communications (multi-literacy), document use and lifelong learning concepts. Many are caregivers within their families, restricting their available time and resources to acquire new/updated training and to enter and retain employment.



Besides language and cultural challenges, new immigrants are often challenged by the structure of work in many companies: shifts, hours of work and other organizational requirements make it difficult to train new workers on-the-job. General entry rules for immigrants do not correspond to the skills requirements of employers in many sectors—including for unskilled, skilled, professional and experienced trades people who often need support transferring their skills, credentials and experience. The skills and work experience of immigrants are often difficult to assess, and their integration into the workforce is frequently delayed and/or impeded by the complex processes of obtaining Canadian accreditation and work references. Many may end up being “stuck” in jobs that are not commensurate with their credentials, previous employment and appropriate salary levels. Those jobs more easily available to them may also be threatened in an increasingly automated economy.

Indigenous people experience particular systemic challenges to participation in the economy and society, which will have an increasing impact on the country as their population expands. The Indigenous population of Canada grew roughly 40% between 2006-2016—approximately four times faster than the general population. A 2016 report by the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board estimated that underemployment of Indigenous people in Canada may be costing the economy nearly 28 billion dollars. It also estimated that if Indigenous people were employed at the same rate as non-Indigenous people, 15.3 billion dollars of employment income would flow into Indigenous hands (Halliday).

According to a 2018 Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD) report, despite continued growth in the labour market, non-Indigenous people have significantly higher levels of labour market participation than Indigenous; and Indigenous women have consistently shown the lowest employment and labor market participation rates. Indigenous populations are also under-represented in knowledge industries and over-represented in industries affected by financial crisis-like construction (OECD).

Although there have been some gains, research suggests that Indigenous communities continue to have unequal access to opportunities within the labour market (Grewal). Other research has pointed to a gap in numeracy and literacy skills in many Indigenous communities. Improvements in education require special attention as to the needs of Indigenous people and how school administrators work with them (Mahboubi and Busby).

An article by Spirit Staffing and Consulting Inc., an Indigenous-owned employment and recruitment agency based in Calgary, identified as the most common issues for Indigenous people: Literacy and Education, Cultural Differences, Racism/Discrimination/Stereotypes, Self-Esteem, Poverty and Poor Housing, Lack of Driver’s License, Transportation and Child Care. The study adds: “For those who are less informed on the issues facing our Aboriginal populations, many of these barriers still sound familiar as they can also affect other groups. The blatantly glaring difference is the ways in which these issues impact community members and often prevent them from achieving proper employment, rather than being a mere inconvenience” (Spirit Staffing & Consulting Inc.).

A recent study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Ontario provincial government, and led by the first Métis physician in Canada, highlights how urban Indigenous people face many of the same challenges as the non-urban population (Keung).

Many Indigenous populations in rural and remote northern communities also face: a dearth of and/or expensive, sub-standard housing; extremely high cost/uneven supply of basic food staples due to the expense of transportation; sub-standard physical and mental health care and counselling services with inconsistent staffing; poor availability of and/or unaffordable transportation; lack of/poor quality of on-site high schools; fewer higher education training opportunities; and few local employment opportunities (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health).

## APPENDIX 2:

### YWCA TORONTO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

YWCA Toronto currently offers employment and training programs and services at three main centres in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and in the community. For details on these programs and services, please see below or visit [www.ywcatoronto.org/employment](http://www.ywcatoronto.org/employment):

#### Located at 222 Dixon Road, Etobicoke, ON

- **English Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC):** Provides no-cost English classes to newcomer women to improve their language skills, enable them to better function in all areas of Canadian life and to fully engage and contribute to Canadian society.
- **JUMP (Join, Unify, Motivate and Participate) Etobicoke:** An immigrant settlement program focused on providing newcomer women and girls 13+ with labour market access, through a variety of essential settlement and employment training services. Participants are required to be Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees or working under the Live-In Caregiver Program.
- **iOS & Android Mobile Application Developer:** Provides a women-only, free of charge, accelerated IT training program. Participants become an iOS and Android Mobile Application Developer and they receive training in Salesforce Administration and Development and complete the Scrum Master certification.
- **Pre-Apprenticeship Program:** Provides women with free of charge pre-apprenticeship training with trade industry partners, safety certifications and job placement/employment assistance to help them enter into the skilled trades. We currently offer the Painter-Decorator Pre-Apprenticeship Program.

#### Located at 2425 Eglinton Avenue East, Scarborough, ON

- **YWCA Employment Centre:** Provides free employment services for persons who require assistance in job searching and for employers. Operates as a one-stop service where job seekers and employers can access resources, including financial incentives or supports, and receive assistance from qualified employment specialists. As part of the program, special incentives and interventions are offered to youth who are 29 years and under to get a job or return to school to advance their education and career prospects.

#### Located at 3090 Kingston Road, Scarborough, ON

- **YWCA Employment Centre:** Provides free employment services primarily for women who require assistance in job searching and for employers. Operates as a one-stop service where job seekers and employers can access resources, including financial incentives or supports, and receive assistance from qualified employment specialists. As part of the program, special incentives and interventions are offered to youth who are 29 years and under to get a job or return to school to advance their education and career prospects.
- **JUMP (Join, Unify, Motivate and Participate) Scarborough:** An immigrant settlement program focused on providing newcomer women and girls 13+ with labour market access, through a variety of essential settlement and employment training services. Participants are required to be Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees or working under the Live-In Caregiver Program.
- **Education and Training Institute:** A vocational college registered with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities offering two certified programs: Professional Office Administration Certificate and Professional Office Administration Diploma. Provides fully sponsored spots or bursaries for those who qualify.

- **Employment Focus:** A free ten-week pre-employment program that offers vocational assessment and career planning for women. It integrates foundational building essentials skills training.
- **Moving On To Success:** A free employment training program for low income women, some of whom may experience domestic violence or who are at risk of abuse. This program integrates core and optional YWCA Building Sustainable Futures model components.
- **Skills Development Centre (SDC):** SDC provides vocational and non-vocational strength-based programs, and offers a wide range of products and services both locally and nationally to individuals and organizations. Products and services can be purchased and/or are free (fully sponsored or subsidized). SDC integrates the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures (BSF) model into their programming through its five components. Please see below for the full list of products and services currently offered by the Skills Development Centre.

**In addition to our full slate of employment and training programs, 3090 Kingston Road is also the site of the following programs:**

- **Family Support Centre:** Offers parenting and child development support for young mothers, mothers and their children who have been exposed to domestic violence and mothers with infants.
- **Girls' Centre:** Provides a drop-in Centre where girls and young women 9 to 18 years of age try new activities, develop skills and discuss topics in a safe place.

## YWCA TORONTO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE INTEGRATES THE YWCA BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES MODEL

### Products and Services currently offered:

#### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT & CAREER MANAGEMENT SERVICES

- Career Planning and Employability Skills
- Career Assessment and Planning (individualized service)
- YWCA Building Sustainable Futures model that can be customized for different groups
- Customized Career Management Services (individualized or group services)  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc)

#### ESSENTIAL SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TRAINING

- **Academic Upgrading**
  - Literacy and Essential Skills—includes General Educational Development
  - (GED—Grade 12 equivalency) preparation  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/les](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/les)
- **Pre-Employment Services**
  - Employment Focus—*Employment Essentials Program* [www.ywcautoronto.org/empfocus](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/empfocus)
- **Computer Training**
  - Computer Training Series: MS Office Intermediate and Advanced Workshops
  - Computer Training for Employment
  - Customized Computer Training Series (including online courses)  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/computertraining](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/computertraining)
- **Occupational Skills Training**
  - Administrative Clerk Certificate\*  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/eti](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/eti)
- **Professional Business Communications/ Administration**
  - Professional Office Administration Series  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/poa](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/poa)
  - Customized Professional Business Communications Course
  - Customer Service Training  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/customerservice](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/customerservice)

#### JOB READINESS & PLACEMENT SERVICES

- Job Search and Networking Workshops and Events
- Recruitment and Placement Services
- Job coaching, Mentoring and 'On-the-Job Training' Services  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc)

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- Life Skills Coach Certificate—train-the-trainer  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/lifeskills](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/lifeskills)
- Personality Dimensions™ Level 1 Training—train-the-trainer  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/pd](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/pd)
- Leadership through Facilitation Series  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/leadership101](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/leadership101)
- Discovering Life Skills Manuals—English (Volumes 1 to 9)
- Discovering Life Skills Manuals—French (Volumes 1, 5, 6, 7, 8)  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/publications](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/publications)
- Other Resources: (Action Manual for Group Activities)

#### LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS SERVICES

- Customized Training and Solutions for Teams and Organizations
- Program Development and Consultation  
[www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc](http://www.ywcautoronto.org/sdc)

*Our Administrative Clerk Certificate is offered through the Education and Training Institute and approved under the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005 by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Ontario.*

## APPENDIX 3:

### INTEGRATING ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT




YWCA Toronto has been refining a strength-based essential skills training model for over ten years, and has now integrated the nine skills intentionally into all of the model’s five components. Drawing on our research and experiential learning, we are also targeting in our training and employment programs the critical skills required by today’s labour market.

#### The Nine Essential Skills





The Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified nine



essential skills needed for work, learning and life: Reading, Document Use, Numeracy, Writing, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Thinking, Computer Use and Continuous Learning. These skills provide the foundation for learning all other skills. They enable people to evolve in their jobs and adapt to workplace change. At a very basic level, essential skills enable people to carry out different tasks, give them a starting point for learning other skills, and help them adjust to change. They are used in the community and the workplace in different forms and at different levels of complexity. For more information, visit Employment and Social Development Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills.html>

Figure 21: The Nine Essential Skills: Adapted from *What are Essential Skills by Employment and Social Development Canada, 9 Sept 2015*. <<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/tools/what-are-essential-skills.html>>

Essential skills	Typical applications	Workplace examples	Community examples
 <p><b>READING</b></p> <p>Understanding materials written in sentences or paragraphs (e.g. letters, manuals).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scan for information or overall meaning.</li> <li>• Read to understand, learn, critique or evaluate.</li> <li>• Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources or from complex and lengthy texts.</li> </ul>	<p>An airline sales agent reads notices on a computer screen, such as special handling requirements or weather information.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to understand a lease agreement for a new apartment.</p>
 <p><b>WRITING</b></p> <p>Communicating by arranging words, numbers and symbols on paper or a computer screen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write to organize or record information.</li> <li>• Write to inform or persuade.</li> <li>• Write to request information or justify a request.</li> <li>• Write an analysis or a comparison.</li> </ul>	<p>Human resources professionals write recommendations on issues such as workplace health and safety.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to complete an application for a credit card.</p>
 <p><b>DOCUMENT USE</b></p> <p>Finding, understanding or entering information (e.g. text, symbols, numbers) in various types of documents, such as tables or forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read signs, labels or lists.</li> <li>• Understand information on graphs or charts.</li> <li>• Enter information in forms.</li> <li>• Create or read schematic drawings.</li> </ul>	<p>A bricklayer interprets blueprints to determine the height, length and thickness of walls.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when referring to a bus schedule to plan an outing.</p>



Essential skills	Typical applications	Workplace examples	Community examples
 <p><b>NUMERACY</b></p> <p>Using numbers and thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make calculations.</li> <li>• Take measurements.</li> <li>• Perform scheduling, budgeting or accounting activities.</li> <li>• Analyze data.</li> <li>• Make estimations.</li> </ul>	<p>Payroll clerks monitor vacation entitlements to prepare budget and scheduling forecasts.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to calculate deductions on personal tax forms.</p>
 <p><b>COMPUTER USE</b></p> <p>Using computers and other forms of technology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use different forms of technology, such as cash registers or fax machines.</li> <li>• Use word processing software.</li> <li>• Send and receive emails.</li> <li>• Create and modify spreadsheets.</li> <li>• Navigate the internet.</li> </ul>	<p>Telephone operators use customized software to scan databases for telephone numbers or long-distance rates.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when withdrawing or depositing money at an automatic teller machine (ATM).</p>
 <p><b>THINKING</b></p> <p>Finding and evaluating information to make rational decisions or to organize work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and resolve problems.</li> <li>• Make decisions.</li> <li>• Find information.</li> <li>• Plan and organize job tasks.</li> <li>• Use critical thinking.</li> <li>• Use memory.</li> </ul>	<p>Paramedics diagnose a patient's condition based on medical charts and their own observations. They use their judgement to start an appropriate treatment plan.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to research and select courses at your local adult learning centre.</p>
 <p><b>ORAL COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>Using speech to exchange thoughts and information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide or obtain information.</li> <li>• Greet, reassure or persuade people.</li> <li>• Resolve conflicts.</li> <li>• Lead discussions.</li> </ul>	<p>Office clerks take messages and share information by phone and in person.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to explain a food allergy to a server at a restaurant.</p>

Essential skills	Typical applications	Workplace examples	Community examples
 <p><b>WORKING WITH OTHERS</b></p> <p><b>Interacting with others to complete tasks.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work independently, alongside others.</li> <li>• Work jointly with a partner or helper.</li> <li>• Work as a member of a team.</li> <li>• Participate in supervisory or leadership activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Municipal engineers work with technicians, inspectors and suppliers to complete construction projects.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when working with volunteers to organize a fundraising activity.</p>
 <p><b>CONTINUOUS LEARNING</b></p> <p><b>Participating in an ongoing process of improving skills and knowledge.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn on the job.</li> <li>• Learn through formal training.</li> <li>• Learn through self-study.</li> <li>• Understand your own learning style.</li> <li>• Know where to find learning resources.</li> </ul>	<p>Retail sales associates improve their skills and knowledge by attending sales training and reading product brochures.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when attending a first aid course at a community centre.</p>

The YWCA BSF model integrates the nine essential skills into all of its components, with a strong focus on foundational skills building:

Figure 22: How the Nine Essential Skills are Integrated within the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures Model

YWCA Toronto Skills Development Centre									
YWCA BSF Model Components	Reading	Document Use	Numeracy	Writing	Oral Communications	Working with Others	Thinking	Computer Use	Continuous Learning
Personal Development & Career Management Services	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Essential Skills & Employability Skills Training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Readiness & Placement Services				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Professional Development Services					✓	✓	✓		✓
Leadership & Business Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Integrating the Emerging Essential Skills

Today's labour market demands a range of critical essential skills, some of which used to be developed through on-the-job experience and/or training. Others are emerging in response to an increasingly digitalized workplace. People may be expected to have many of these skills before applying for a job, and to take charge of upgrading them on an ongoing basis as their careers evolve.

A 2018 Royal Bank of Canada report stated:  
*"In the coming decade, half of all jobs will be disrupted by technology and automation... We are living through an era of radical change, with the latest advancements in artificial intelligence and automation transforming the way we work, even in unexpected fields such as law and customer service... Developing human skills—things like critical thinking, judgment, and decision making—will empower young people to pivot between careers and across sectors even as job descriptions change. Digital fluency will be essential to all new jobs... Soon, we will come to think about digital literacy like we do regular literacy: a prerequisite for nearly any job..."*

*We need schools to teach and certify skills, governments to develop programs that support lifelong learning, and companies to hire for core skills over credentials. By building skillsets that allow them to move from job to job, young Canadians will be able to take advantage in a new economy where it doesn't matter what you've done—it matters what you can do"* (Royal Bank of Canada).

Formerly called soft skills, these adaptable skills have become so important to the 21st century global economy that they are being re-named by more emphatic terms such as human skills, social skills, new-collar skills and real skills. Many leaders in the field emphasize that these skills are not all innate; they can be learned, just as people learn vocational skills (Murphy; Antoun).

In order to keep training current with labour market trends, and to promote continuous learning, we are researching these new skills and integrating them intentionally into our YWCA BSF model, informed by feedback from our staff and our LinksToJobs Employers Network. We also pay close attention to participant feedback about what they consider they need to learn, in order to build the skills for success. Among these important skills are:

**Motivation and Self-direction:** Our model is designed to develop skills of self-direction, independence and advocacy. In all of our components, we work with people to grow and practice key skills such as: assertiveness, autonomy, problem solving, self-advocacy, action planning, the ability to navigate complex systems, agility to respond to unexpected obstacles, and strong leadership.

**Flexible/Adaptable Digital Skills:** Our partnerships with education, training and business organizations enable us to work with participants beyond the old definition of computer use, in order to keep pace with the new ways that digital skills are being used in the workplace. Partners are also providing participants with opportunities to hone their skills through mentorships, job placements, and face-to-face as well as e-learning events.

**An Entrepreneurial Approach:** The YWCA Skills Development Centre (SDC) and the YWCA BSF model give participants the chance to take calculated risks in a supportive environment. We work with our employer partners to motivate participants to take on new challenges, think strategically about how to reach their own goals, and grow resilience to deal with setbacks. In their group work and at our events, participants can practice their interpersonal skills for the workplace, brainstorm about problem-solving techniques, build and expand their networks, and hone their self-presentation and time-management skills.

**Emotional Intelligence:** YWCA Toronto’s emotional intelligence skills building includes:

- Valuing listening and learning from diverse perspectives, and from the intersections of experience and identity. The learning process is for everyone. Through feedback from the women in our programs, we are continuously learning from them about this vital skill.
- Engaging in difficult conversations and learning from criticism and setbacks.
- Encouraging discussion about rights and boundaries.
- Resolving disputes.
- Managing stress and life balance.
- Practicing storytelling and analyzing body language.
- Working to inspire others, to create and strengthen understanding, mutual respect and empathy.
- Fostering networks among participants, alumnae, staff, and our employer and community partners so that even after graduation participants can avoid becoming isolated and can continue to build on their communities of support.

## NAMING THE NEW ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The founder of the non-profit organization Venture for Canada, Scott Stirrett, prefers author, public speaker and founder of altMBA Seth Godin’s term human skills:

“... as it provides an appropriately broad umbrella definition for describing a wide subset of characteristics relevant to working with others, thinking critically and being self-aware (Stirrett).

“As part of this classification, Mr. Godin breaks human skills into five categories, which include self-control, productivity, wisdom, perception, and influence. These categories encompass our ability to interact collaboratively with others, as well to think strategically and regulate emotions... In 2016, the World Economic Forum published an extensive report called The Future of Jobs. One of the report’s main findings is that ‘social skills—such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others—will be in higher demand across industries’ (Stirrett).

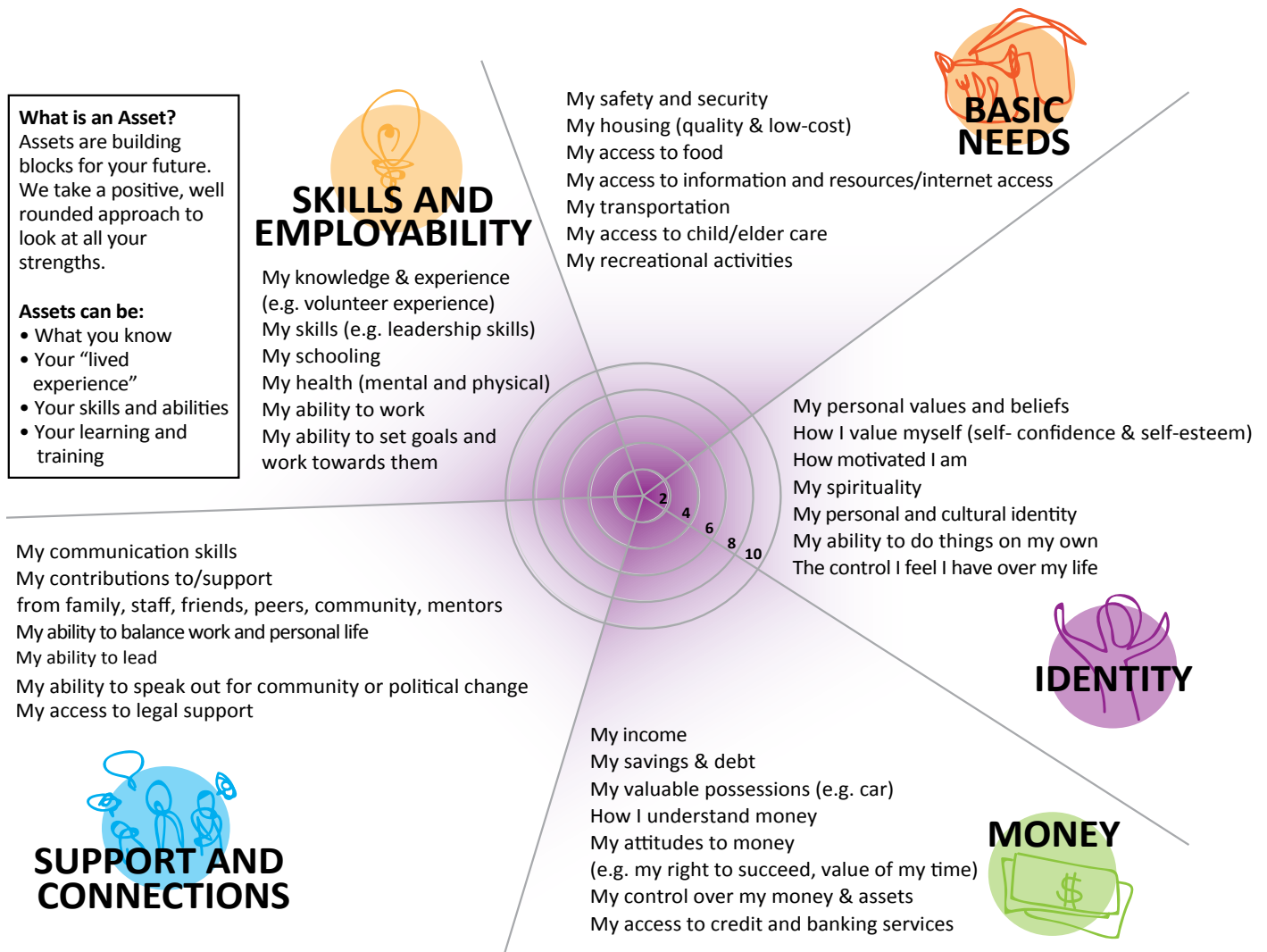
“According to a survey of major employers by the Business Council of Canada, Canadian firms do not face a ‘comprehensive skills shortage,’ although there are some gaps in specific technical areas. Instead, the survey indicates that hiring managers identify soft skills as ‘most in-demand.’ ...While technical abilities are important to thriving in a 21st-century economy, there needs to also be a national focus on developing essential human skills in all Canadians” (Stirrett).

## APPENDIX 4:

### KEY EVALUATION TOOLS: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT LEVEL—

Designed and Implemented in the 2015-2016 Pilot Phase of Project

#### a. Individual Participant Level Asset Map



Adapted with permission of Eko Nomos and *Resources for Results*



b. Participant Outcomes Survey

**PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES SURVEY**

We'd like you to fill in this survey because your story is important to us.  
 We want to know what difference \_\_\_\_\_ has made in your life.  
 Think about the changes that may have happened to you as a result of being a part of our project/group,  
 as you fill in your answers.

About this survey:

- It will take about 15 minutes to complete
- We are happy to help you
- All of your answers are private and confidential
- You can choose not to answer questions as you go through the survey

Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- Yes  
 No

The following questions explore how you have changed as a result of being a part of this project/group.

**1. My basic needs**

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I am better at finding the information and resources I need						
I have connected to other supports and services in the community						
I have my basic needs in place (like housing and child care) so I can focus on this training/group						
I have my basic needs in place (like housing and child care) so I can focus on this training/group						
I am less stressed than when I first came here						

## 2. Support

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
Coaching and support from staff has helped me move towards my goals						
I have met other participants who support me						
I have new contacts to help me find work						
I have support and advice from a mentor or employer to help me find or keep a job						

## 3. My career

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I have a good sense of my strengths and abilities						
I have a better idea about the kind of work that suits me						
I have set out my employment goal(s)						
I know what skills I need to improve, so that I can reach my goals						

## Planning and making decisions

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I plan, and I make "to do" lists to keep me moving forward						
I am better at identifying my choices and deciding what to do next						
I take steps to deal with things that are holding me back						

#### 4. My readiness to work

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I have a better understanding of today's world of work / job market						
I am more aware of what it takes to get and keep a job						
I now have work experience that makes me more employable						
I am more ready and able to work						

#### 5. My sense of self

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I have a better idea of who I am and what I can do						
I am more positive and confident						
I find it easier to think about the future						

#### 6. My finances

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Not Applicable
I am better at managing my money						
I have a spending plan that keeps me on track						

#### 7. How things have changed for me

How has this project/group made a difference in your life?

### 8. Satisfaction

How likely is it that you would suggest this project/group to a friend or family member?

0 Not at all likely	1	2	3	4	5 Very likely

Comments?

### 9. Essential Skills for Employment

How much have you improved these skills since you first came to the project/group? Check “not applicable” for skills you did not work on.

	No change 1	A little improved 2	Somewhat improved 3	Greatly improved 4	Not Applicable 5
1. Reading and understanding forms and other written documents					
2. Using and organizing information (forms, lists, tables, graphs, maps)					
3. Writing business documents (letters, memos)					
4. Working with and making sense of numbers (data, measurements, budgeting)					
5. Speaking up and sharing my ideas					
6. Customer service skills					
7. Job search skills (resume writing, researching jobs, interviewing)					
8. Planning and organizing job tasks					
9. Using computer software (Word, Excel)					
10. Using the internet					
11. Working on a team (coordinating tasks, sharing resources, solving conflicts)					

### 10. Dealing with life challenges

Which of the following things did our staff help you with?

Check all that apply

- Improving my housing
- Improving my access to quality food
- Accessing transport
- Accessing new sources of income
- Supporting me to deal with my physical health and/or disability
- Improving my personal safety
- Accessing childcare
- Dealing with my immigration papers
- Helping me deal with my mental health and/or addictions
- Dealing with legal issues
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

### 11. Most helpful supports and services

Which of our activities made the most difference to you?

Check no more than three.

- One-to-one support from staff
- Learning about myself (for example, my personality type)
- Skills training to work in a specific job or sector
- Help in building job search skills (resume, interview skills)
- Doing a self-assessment of my skills and abilities
- Learning about what employers want
- Job coaching—getting support from staff to help me find and keep a job
- Meeting employers
- Getting on-the-job experience
- Connecting to people who will buy my product (self-employment)
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

### 12. New skills or training

Tell us about any changes in your training or education since you came to the project/group.

Check all that apply.

- No change
- I have gone on to further training or education
- I have earned new credentials (please explain)
- I have improved my English language skills
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

### 13. Activities in the community and/or job market

Check all that apply.

- I am actively looking for work
- I started a new volunteer position as a result to this project/group
- I found paid work as a result of this project/group
- I now have clear, realistic career plans
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_



#### 14. Current employment

What paid work are you doing right now? Check all that apply.

- I am not doing any paid work right now (Skip below and “Tell us about yourself”)
- I am working in a part-time job
- I am working in a full-time job
- I am working in more than one job
- I am in a temporary internship or work placement
- I am self-employed
- I do odd jobs for cash (such as babysitting)
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 15. Self-employment

What have you done to start your business? Check all that apply.

- I am not pursuing self-employment
- I have learned the skills I need to start my business
- I have a basic business plan
- I have already sold my product or service
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 16. Tell us about the quality of your current job

Check all that apply.

- My work is more regular and stable than before
- I am making better use of my skills and training than in past jobs
- The job I am doing now is moving me towards my career goals
- I am earning more money than before
- I am earning a living wage. I am better able to support my family
- My work hours are very long
- The job I am in now will offer me more chance of promotion
- Other (please note) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Tell us about yourself...

**17. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- I don't identify as male or female

**18. Were you born in Canada?**

- Yes
- No

**19. Would you say that you are part of the following groups?**

Check all that apply.

- Indigenous
- Immigrant (5 years or less)
- Immigrant (over 5 years)
- Youth (Age 30 and under)
- Mature worker (over age 45)
- A person with a disability

**20. What is your age?**

- 20 years and under
- 21-30 years
- 31-40 years
- 41-50 years
- 51-60 years
- 61-70 years
- Over 70 years

*Thank you!*

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## CONTACT DETAILS

YWCA Agvvik Nunavut  
867-979-4500  
<http://ywca-agvvik.ca>

YWCA Halifax  
902-423-6162  
<http://www.ywcahalifax.com>  
358 Herring Cove Road  
Halifax, NS B3R 1S2

YWCA Hamilton  
905-522-9922  
<http://www.ywcahamilton.org>  
75 MacNab Street South  
Hamilton, ON L8P 3C1

YWCA Metro Vancouver  
604-895-5800  
<http://www.ywcavan.org>  
535 Hornby Street  
Vancouver, BC V6C 2E8

YWCA Moncton  
506-855-4349  
<http://www.ywcamoncton.com>  
135 Kendra Street  
Moncton, NB E1C 9V9

YMCA-YWCA National Capital Region  
613-237-1320  
<http://www.ymcaywca.ca>  
180 Argyle Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K2P 1B7

YWCA Saskatoon  
306-244-7034  
<http://www.ywcasaskatoon.com>  
510-25th Street East  
Saskatoon, SK S7K 4A7

YWCA Thompson  
204-778-6341  
<http://www.ywcatompson.com>  
39 Nickel Road  
Thompson, MB R8N 0Y5

YWCA Toronto  
416-269-0090  
<https://www.ywcatoronto.org>  
3090 Kingston Road, Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M1M 1P2



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