

Halton Youth Collective Program



Halton Youth Transitioning from Care Pilot Study - 2020

Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS)



Acknowledgement of the Territories

Halton, as we know it today, is rich in the history and modern traditions of many First Nations and the Métis. From the lands of the Anishinabe to the Attawandaron, the Haudenosaunee, and the Métis, these lands surrounding the Great Lakes are steeped in Indigenous history. We acknowledge and thank the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for being stewards of the traditional territory upon which this research and programming took place. We are in solidarity with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to honour and respect the four directions, lands, waters, plants, animals and ancestors that walked before us, and all of the wonderful elements of creation that exist.

Special Thanks to our Friends:



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Background:

Youth Transitioning from Care

Every year in Ontario, 800 to 1,000 youth transition from care of child welfare services. (Kovarikova, 2017). Unfortunately, many of these young people fail to receive or procure the necessary supports to help them successfully navigate their transition to independent living (Our Voice Our Turn, May, 2002).

Difficult transitions for Youth Transitioning from Care often result in a series of negative outcomes for these individuals; ranging from homelessness, unemployment, lack of educational engagement and achievement, involvement in corrections, lack of skills and potentially, a life of poverty (Hub, 2019).

According to Statistics Canada data (2016), 3640 youth aged 15-24 in the Halton Region are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Of those aged 15-19, 4.1% are NEET and for those aged 20-24, 6.8% are in NEET. Data from Halton CAS programming as at 2017 showed that of the 82 youth in their programming, 22 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) - more than 1 in 4 of these youth or over 25%.

Recognizing that this subset of youth is at greater risk for poorer outcomes is a first step towards making effective change. We at Halton CAS recognize that the outcomes for young people who are leaving care or “aging-out” of the child protection system are not particularly positive. As a response, and in partnership with many social service agencies and community granters in Halton, we are constantly striving to deliver quality programs, services, and tools **to ensure transitioning youth are provided with the necessary skills and opportunities to successfully transition from care to independent living.**

“I had to teach myself everything. It is the scariest thing, aging out. I lost my social workers. I lost my therapy. I lost my support worker. I lost everything.”

Kian Fernandez

youth advocate and former crown ward, as reported by W5: CTV News (Hamovitch, 2020)

“The Foundation’s 2018 Vital Youth Report identified the challenges of youth exiting our care system making a successful transition to employment education or training. On average for Oakville youth aged 20-24, 5.4% of females and 6.3% of males were not in an education employment or training (NEET) compared to 27% NEET Halton CAS youth. Clearly youth exiting care need better support on their transition to greater personal sustainability. NEET is a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator and the SDG commitment is to “leave no one behind.” The long term goal is to bring youth exiting care to similar Oakville wide NEET rates and eliminate the disparity at the beginning of adulthood.”

Wendy Rinella

CEO, Oakville Community Foundation

“It’s a really harrowing message to hear that I’m part of a population that’s five times more likely to die than our out-of-care peers.”

Dylan Cohen

youth advocate and former crown ward, as reported by W5: CTV News (Hamovitch, 2020)

What is the Halton Youth Collective Program (HYCP)?

An initiative of the Oakville Community Foundation (OCF), the **Halton Granter’s Roundtable** began as a group of funders who wanted to identify ways to collaborate, address priority needs in the community, and create a more substantive impact to benefit local charities and the people they serve. After a series of consultative engagements with researchers and local charitable organizations, the issue of youth transitioning from care emerged as a central issue in need of attention.

The Halton Youth Collective (HYC) is made up of representatives from the Halton Granter’s Roundtable, a team of youth, and 25 diverse youth serving agencies representing a range of social services, from housing to education, mental health to employment and training. It is a collaborative approach to problem-solving and decision-making, grounded in data, with the youth voice playing a key role, to collectively address the issues confronting youth as they transition out of care.

Within the Collective, the Oakville Community Foundation acts as the backbone, taking the lead in organizing the Collective while Halton CAS is the lead agency for service delivery and the primary connection with the youth. HYC operates as a resource hub for young people and Children’s Aid Society case workers to address needs as they arise.



Goal and Activities of the HYCP:

The Halton Youth Collective Program spent considerable time and energy defining the outcome it was looking to achieve, and how it would go about achieving it. This resulted in a clear intended impact statement, owned by the Collective and its members, which grounded the Theory of Change - a model of the necessary actions to achieve that objective. In 2018 the Collective landed on this Intended Impact Statement (the outcome/goal):

By 2022, 90% of youth, 18-24 supported ⁽¹⁾by CAS Halton, are satisfied ⁽²⁾with their education, employment and/or training.

¹Supported = had an open file with CAS Halton before age 18, and/or are currently in a CAS Halton program (including Continued Care Supporting Youth - CCSY and Bridging the Gap - BTG)

²Satisfied = it is worth noting that the Collective opted to set their goal as more than the youth being employed, in education or training. If this were all that was required, many participants who were expected to benefit from this program would not be eligible. Having a part-time job would have disqualified them, even if they wanted a full-time job, or really wanted to be back in school to be able to get a better job. "Satisfaction" was the term chosen to note that the youth were where they wanted to be or saw that they were on the path to getting there.

The Theory of Change identified five sequential activities seen as essential components of a program they envisioned to achieve the intended impact

statement, and planned to pilot:

- Identify youth for the program
- Offer participating youth immediate incentives enabling education, employment or training
- Match the youth to a mentor and support that mentor
- Co-create a plan for enabling education, employment or training, led by the youth, supported by their mentor and CAS
- Provide access to supports as needed, through a Community Table

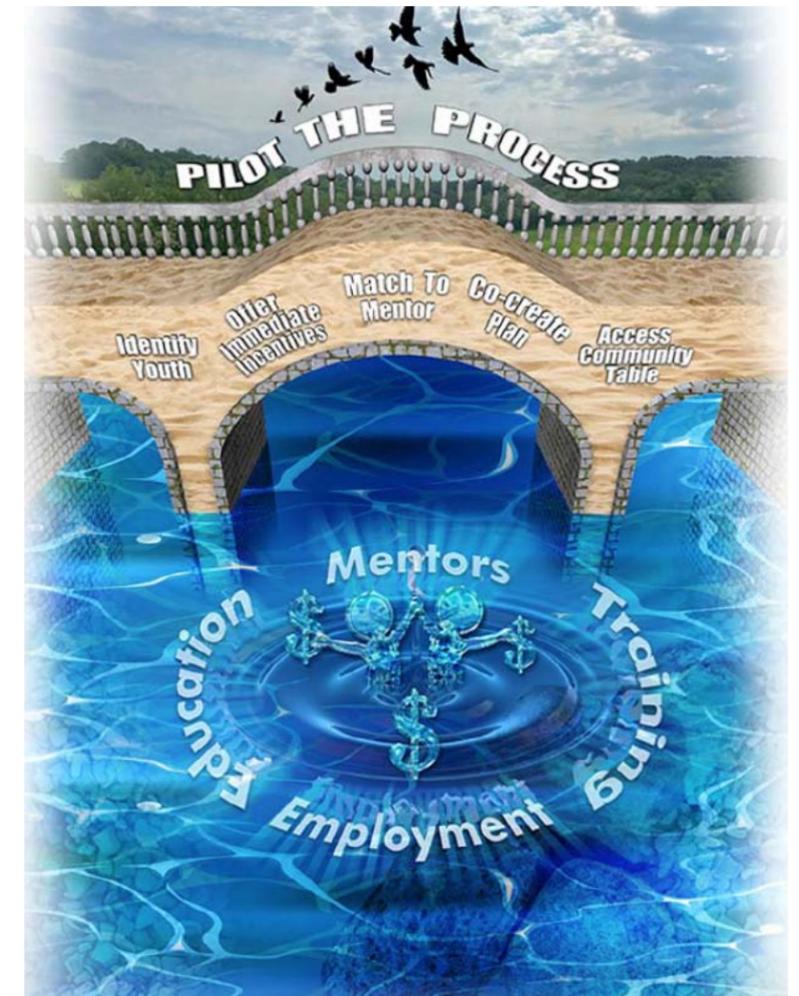
The Theory of Change also identified a possible need to look beyond the programmatic offering and build the system (to be revisited after the pilot):

- Build a mentor pool, for ongoing availability of mentors
- Enable accessible paid programs supporting employment, internships, training and treatment (e.g mental health supports)

As a means of articulating the intentions and process of this Pilot initiative, participating youth, with support from Halton CAS, designed the illustration concept to the right. The youth saw these as the steps to bridge them to being satisfied with their education, employment and/or training.

The process begins with CAS and youth themselves identifying potential participants in the pilot initiative. Interested youth applied to and were assessed by CAS staff against a set criteria. The pilot cohort then

Design concept provided by the youth



moved on to the next stage of the process, being offered incentives to address immediate barriers to education, employment or training, such as paying for courses like SmartServe or buying workboots needed for a job. It could also include addressing barriers to being ready for employment, education or training, such as securing stable housing, transportation, or mental health supports, or be set up as an incentive, such as receiving a gift card for groceries, upon completion of a course. From there, the youth was matched with a mentor or support person, and they began to build a relationship. The youth, CAS worker and mentor then developed a plan together- complete with further financial incentives (generally covering costs) to support completing the various stages of that plan. If that plan required additional supports, those needs would be brought to the Community Table (a network of relevant youth-related service agencies), to both access and coordinate the range of services they require. Taken as a whole, this collaborative, empowering process is meant to enable participating youth to meet their transition goals for employment, education, and training, recognizing that housing is a foundational component.

The concept of "Pilot the Process" means to connote a hope that the pilot's approach to supporting youth transitioning from care can be tested and proven, and then be expanded and serve as a model for others.

The youth in the water are afloat, buoyed up by the key components to achieve satisfaction with education, employment, and training - they have financial support, and an important relationship with a mentor or support person.

The 1 Year Pilot Project:

The Halton Youth Exiting Care Pilot Study

In September 2019, the Halton Youth Collective launched a 1-year pilot program as a test case for the Collective's collaborative approach to supporting youth transitioning from care.

As mentioned, the Collective's overall goal, or intended impact statement, was that by 2022, 90% of youth, 18-24, supported by CAS Halton, are satisfied with their education, employment or training. They felt it wasn't enough for youth to be in education, employment or training (EET), otherwise people working part time when they wanted to be full time, or working when they wanted to be in school to be able to get a better job, would be hidden. Yet satisfaction didn't necessarily mean they were happy with where they were at, but they could see that they were on the path they wanted to be on.

This pilot was to test the process, the Theory of Change, that the Collective believed would shift these youth to being satisfied with their EET.

The Pilot Program focused on the needs of 26 youth and sought to assess the impact of the new approach, as well as its overall costs, and which components are successful and which need tweaking.

As part of the pilot, Halton Children's Aid Society took a leadership role in matching 26 youth with coaches and mentors, many of whom have lived experiences similar to their youth mentee. HYCP organizations participating in the Collective helped spread the word within their own organizations and the community at large to target potential mentors.

"We felt that the pilot program would be an important first step towards better youth centered outcomes building on the stability that comes from supporting employment, training and education. The youth sat at the table with the collaborating agencies to design a pilot program that would meet their needs and at their pace. To add to the support, we all acknowledged the critical need for mentors to support the path the youth would explore."

Steve Levac

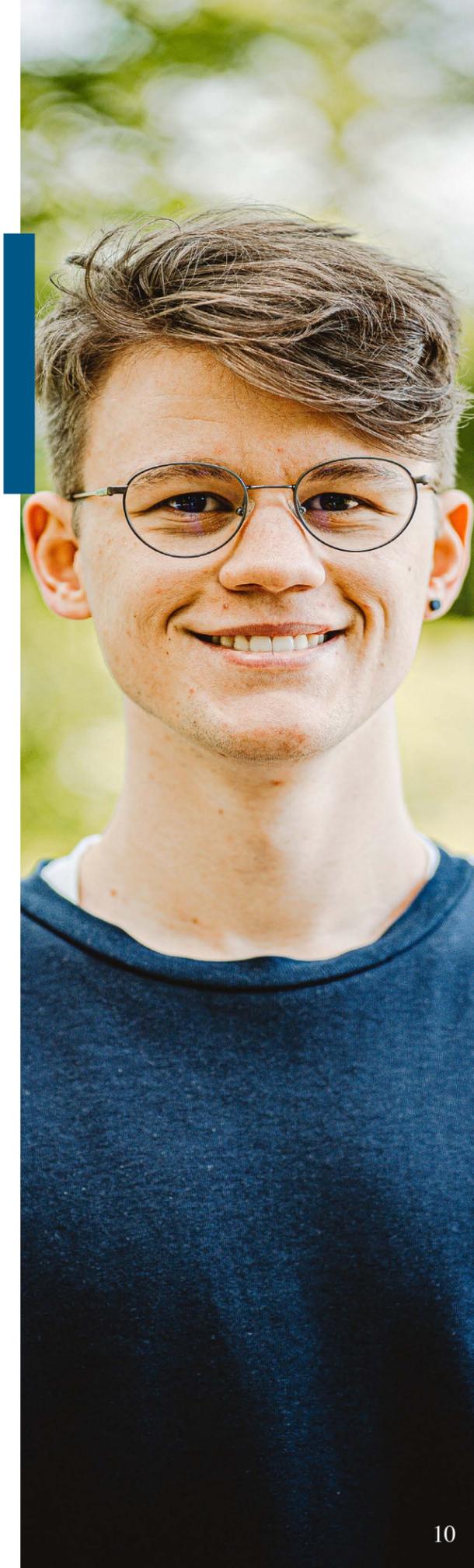
Manager of Youth Services, Halton Children's Aid Society

Intended Impact Statement or Collective's goal by 2022:



90%

of youth, 18-24, supported by CAS Halton, are satisfied with their education, employment or training.



Identifying Youth:

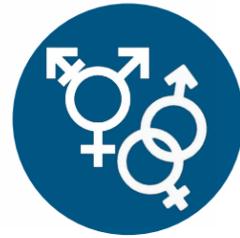
Profile of Youth Participants at the Outset

(September 2019 at baseline intake)

A total of 26 youth participating in the pilot representing the ethno-cultural and racial diversity of the communities across Halton



- 46% are 18-19 years of age
- 54% are 20-25 years of age



- over half identify as female; 1 in 3 identify as male
- almost 1 in 5 identify as non-binary, trans or transitioning
- youth self identify as heterosexual, bi-sexual or pansexual



- 56% not enrolled in education or training
- of those enrolled, almost 1 in 3 are enrolled in full-time studies



- 50% not in employment
- of those working, mostly in part-time employment

Self-identified Strengths

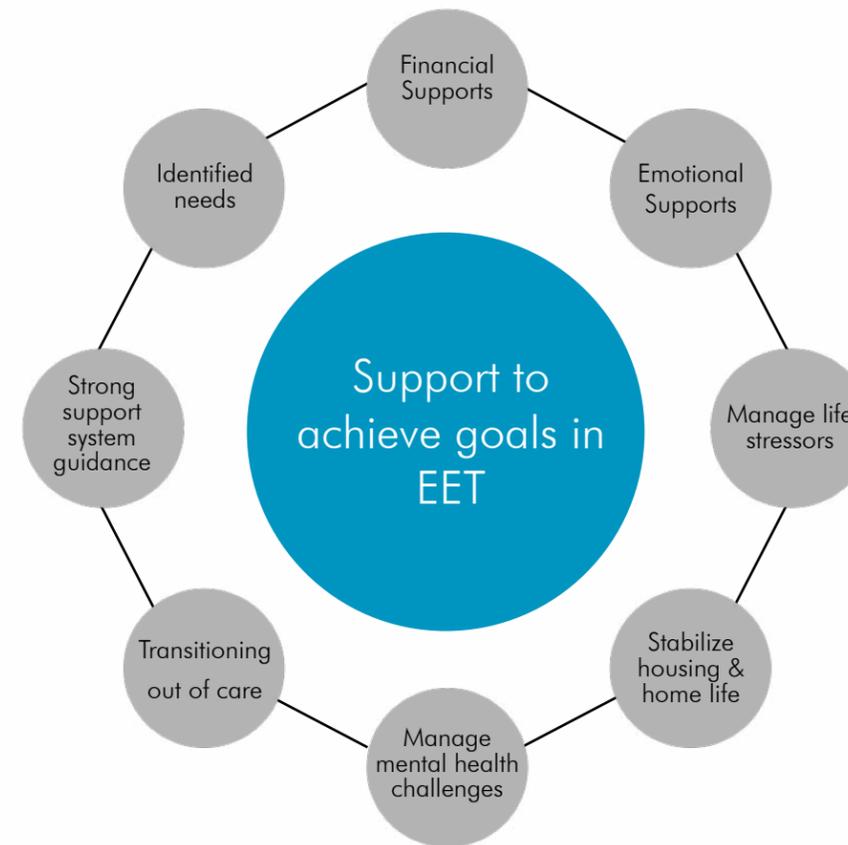
Interests/Hobbies

- art
- music
- movies
- physical activities
- spending time with friends
- animals
- playing video games
- cooking
- advocacy work
- politics

Strengths

- Responsible
- Determined
- Friendly
- Quick-learner
- Honest
- Resilient
- Intelligent
- Trustworthy
- Realistic
- Kind
- Good-listener
- Flexible
- Hard-working
- Punctual

What Were Youth Looking For?



Youth seek stability and support

"I want to be employed full-time at a good job I enjoy. I don't want to struggle to live anymore"

Biggest Worries:

overcoming mental health barriers; financial; about the future and transitioning to independence; finding stable housing; failing in academics, not achieving goals including future career goals

Current Supports:

Bridging the Gap; CAS; mentors; family; friends; social workers; foster parents, mental health and social service agencies



Status of Youth at Outset:

Education

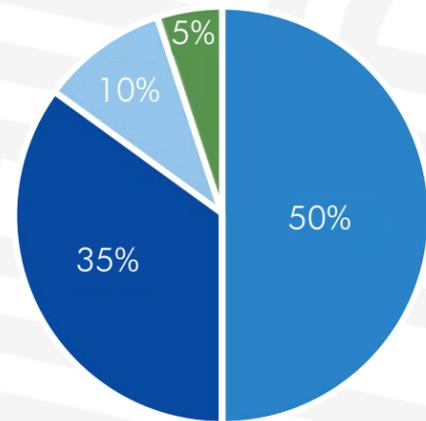


45%

9 out of 20 youth are currently attending school

91%

of youth would like to return to school (10)
*of those who are not currently attending



Educational Attainment

- Attending/attended high school but have not graduated (10)
- High school graduate or equivalency (7)
- Currently attending college (2)
- Graduated college (1)

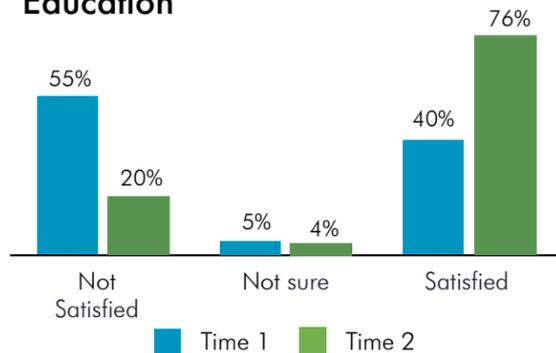
Even accounting for the increased response rate in the post-survey, the number of youth satisfied with their education increased by at least 50%.



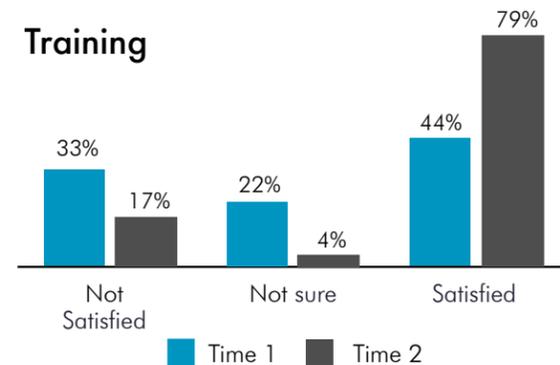
Satisfaction

Are you satisfied with your level of:

Education



Training



- Satisfaction with education increased overall by 36%
- 31% of youth had an increase in their level of satisfaction with education
- Satisfaction with training increased overall by 35%
- 15% of youth had an increase in their level of satisfaction with training

Note: While an intake survey, pre-and post-survey, were conducted, the lower (77%) participation rate in the pre-survey has made it difficult to directly compare progress. We share the intake form findings as a snapshot of where youth were at the beginning of the Pilot.

Barriers to Education & Training

- Mental health challenges (70%)
- Financial barriers (55%)
- Transportation (40%)
- Problem with a teacher/staff (30%)
- Drug or alcohol challenges (20%)
- Being bullied (20%)
- Learning disability (20%)
- Not having enough to eat
- Discrimination
- Chronic illness
- Physical disability

COVID impacts on Education:



4%

of youth reported impacts on mental health

44%

reported that online school was much more difficult for them or they had delayed starting school because of the online schooling



Employment

65%

13 out of 20 youth currently have a job

Barriers to Employment

- Mental health challenges (60%)
- Transportation (35%)
- Chronic illness (15%)
- Financial barriers (15%)
- Not having enough to eat
- Discrimination
- Physical disability
- Problem with a teacher/staff
- Drug or alcohol challenges
- Being bullied

COVID Impacts on Employment:



4%

of youth reported impacts on mental health



12%

of youth reported difficulty finding employment

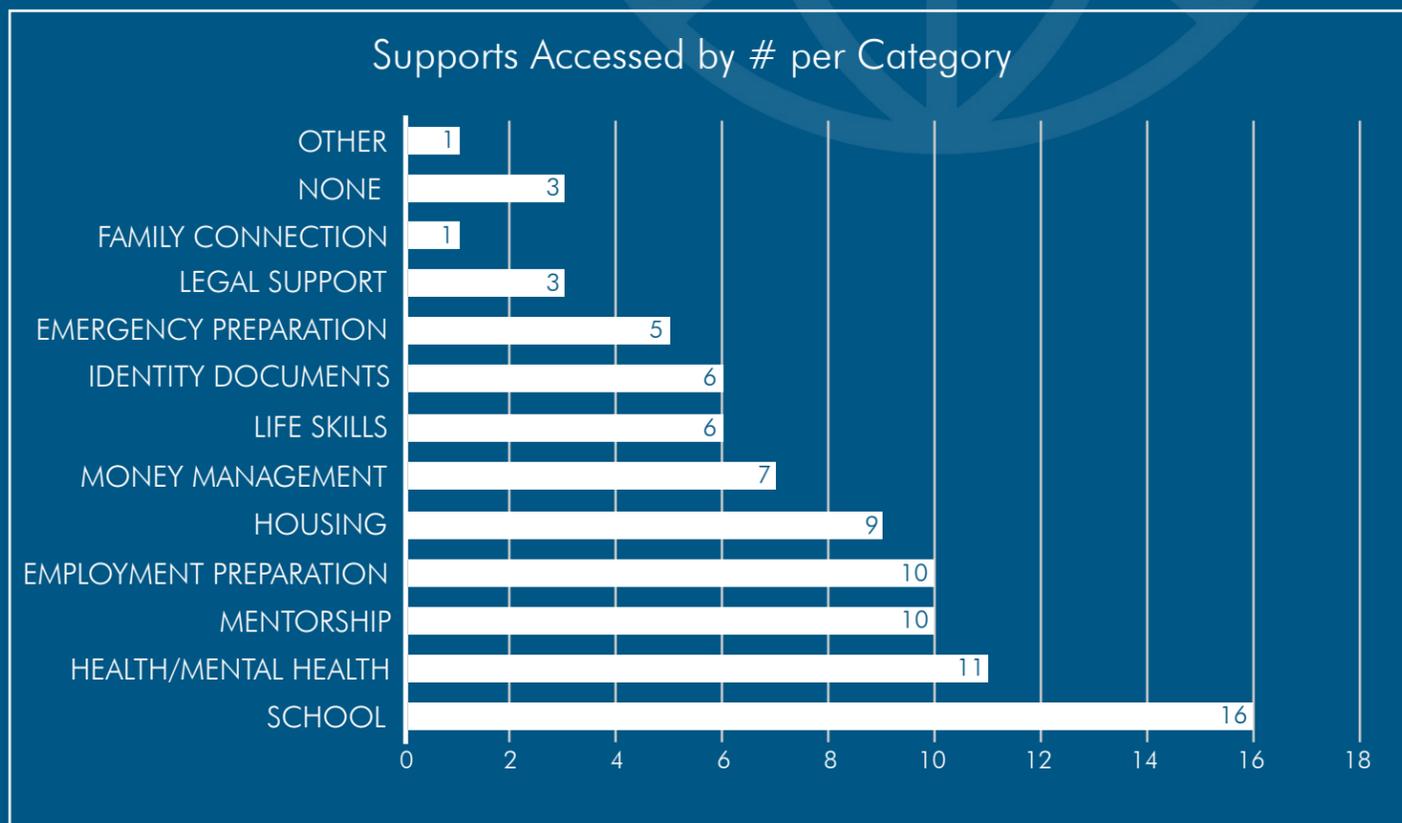


16%

reported lost hours or lost employment

Incentives/ Supports

Supports Provided by Collective Members During Pilot

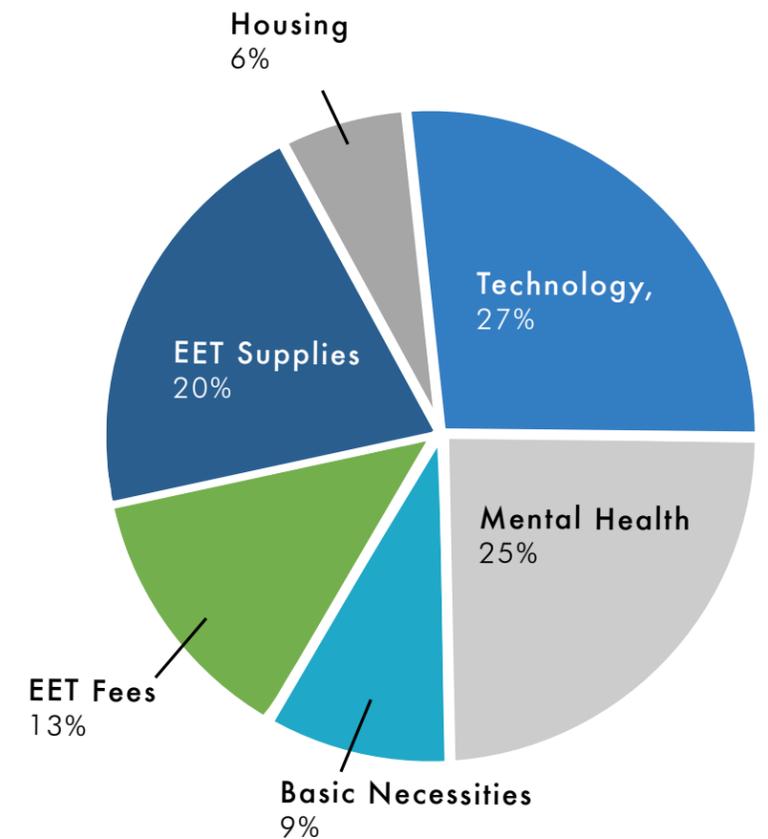


It is important to note that 55% of youth in the pilot were spending more than 30% of their monthly income on rent. 30% of income on rent is a standard used by the government to indicate that they may be “cost burdened” or “core housing need”. Those who spend 50% or more are considered “severely cost burdened” or “severe housing need”.

Overall Needs & Incentives by Category Funded

Most funds went to technology (27%), mental health (25%) and training & education supplies (20%)

Financial support seems not to have been the most important outcome from the pilot. We budgeted anticipating that a small number of youth (about 20%) would have more significant financial needs, while most youth would benefit from \$1000 being available for supports. Overall, we had budgeted approximately \$60,000 for direct financial support of the 26 youth, yet only spent approximately \$30,000.



“So helpful. I got funds to get winter jacket and boots around winter time. The team helped with financial problems and housing. Also helped a lot to have someone like [my mentor] to talk to.”

Youth Participant

“I used my money towards paying off some of my schooling that I had done so that helped me a lot,”

Youth Participant

Pilot Impact:

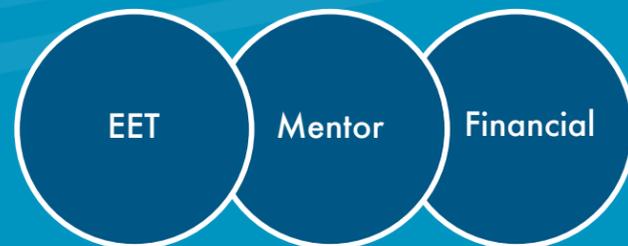
Education, Employment & Training Goals and Results

As a participant of the program, did you feel supported in meeting your own needs to work on achieving your goals of employment, education or training?

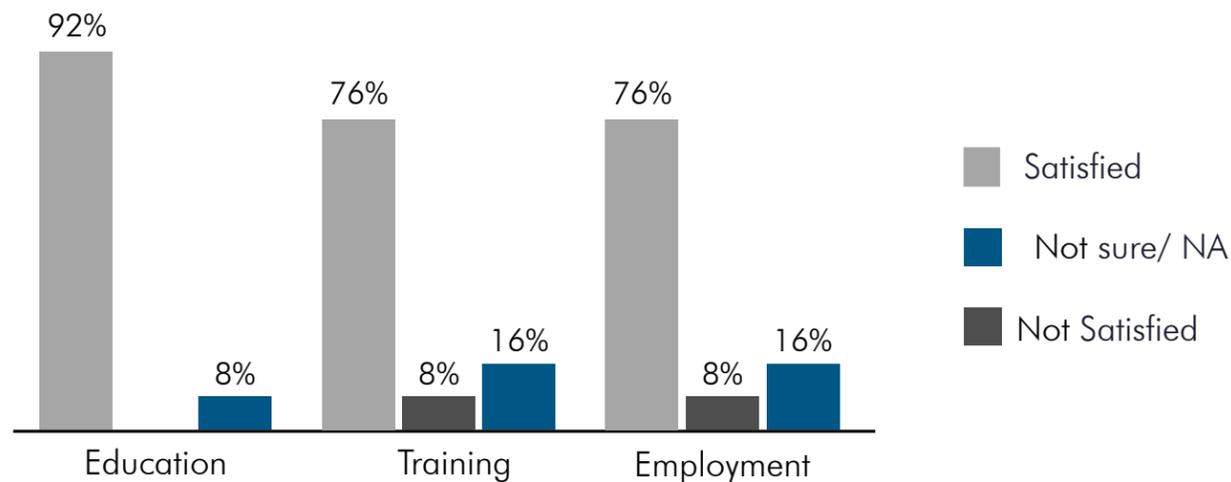
Yes – felt supported (11)	Felt partially supported (10)	Did not feel supported (3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentor support/having someone to rely on Support with EET goals Financial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could have learnt more/ some progress was made Communication could have been better It was a start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty connecting with mentor

"I got a lot of tools to help me start my goals"

Youth Participant



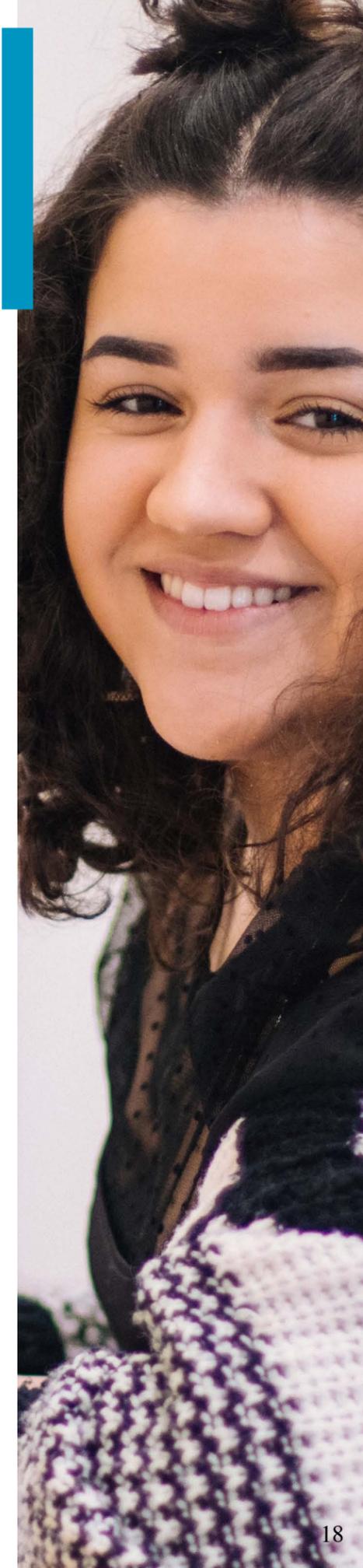
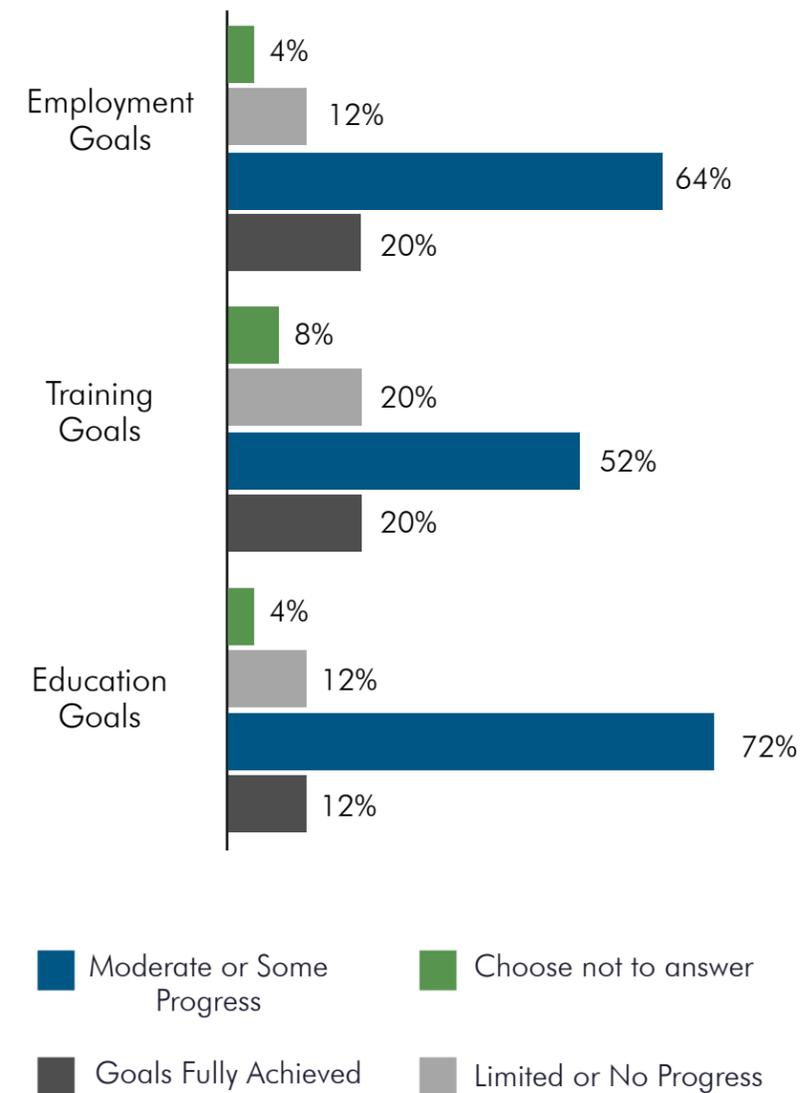
Satisfaction with EET Plans



"I feel like the progress I have made with the collective impact will help me now and in the future. I think the additional First Aid training will make my resume more appealing and being able to pursue a career in an industry I am interested in I think will really help in achieving my life goals of stable reliable work and housing."

Youth Participant

Progress in Achieving EET Goals



Mentorship:

Eighty-one percent:



of youth with mentors said the mentor was helpful to them



Gave advice and support with goals

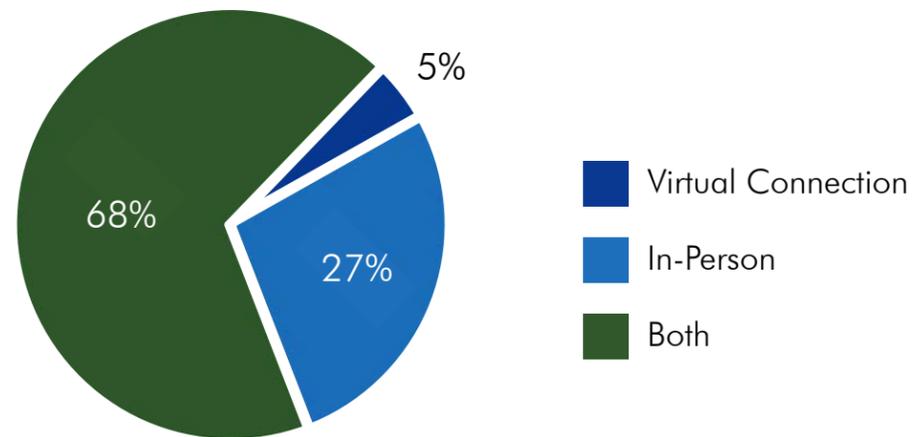


Always willing to help (availability)



Supportive and motivating (regular check-ins)

Youth and Mentor Engagement



"I hope one day I can be a mentor or help CAS kids in some way because I've been through the system and it's not completely designed for care workers to help in the ways they'd like to sometimes, also not every youth is the same and shouldn't be treated the same in the sense that we all learn different."

Youth Participant

"I was set up with a mentor in this program and we have only messaged over text but she has been a positive person and understanding. I have been happy to have someone to reach out to even if I have not used that line of communication very much."

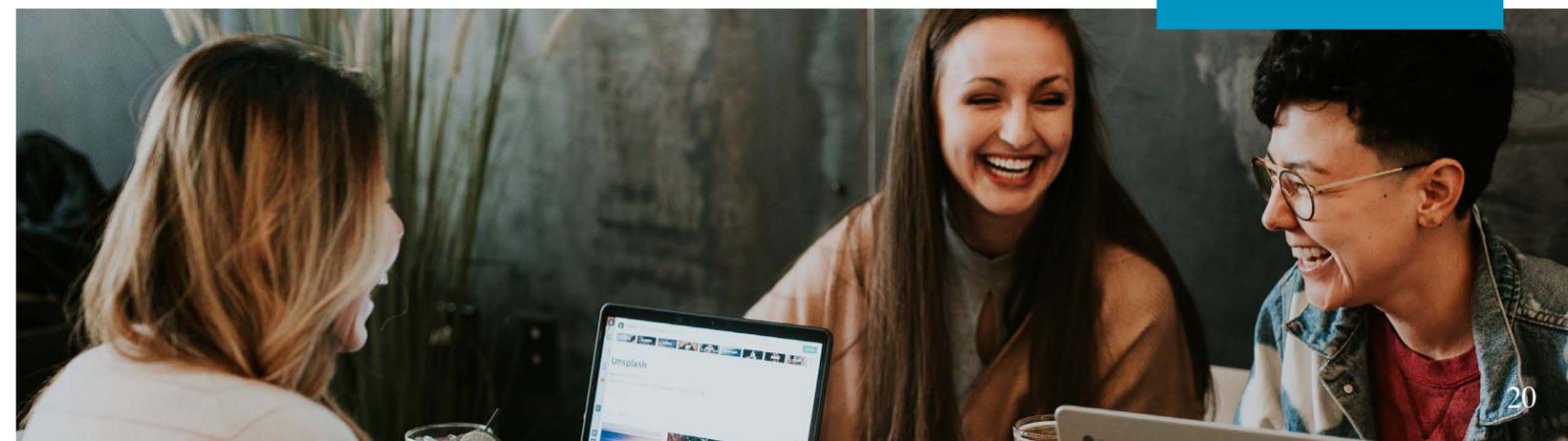
Youth Participant

Pilot Process Results:

Overall, interim outcomes identified in the Theory of Change were achieved:

- Youth are connected to a caring adult/mentor ✓
- Youth have long term goals ✓
- Youth's needs are met to address barriers to employment, education or training ✓
- Youth have sustainable, continuous housing ✓
- There's a pool of ready mentors as the program rolls out beyond the pilot ✓
- Youth have a trusted, informal relationship ✓
- Youth are employed and employable ✓
- There are a variety of accessible, paid education, employment, training and treatment options for youth ✓

	My mentor listened to me and understood my issues	I am happy with the services and supports I received in this program	I am better able to deal with issues that I sought help with	Overall, I feel that I have benefited from participating in the program
Agree	16 (72%)	20 (83%)	14 (58%)	20 (83%)



Learnings:

Key Success Factors

The survey data pointed to three important components of the success of this initiative from the youth perspective: the focus on goals; the financial support to overcome barriers; and the relationship between the youth, their mentor and CAS worker.

The collective itself identified these additional internal success factors:

Importance of mentors and mentorship relationships. A prominent take-away of this pilot program is the benefit of mentors and mentorship relationships for youth transitioning from care. The benefits of mentoring young people are significant, well-established and well-documented. This pilot project confirms and furthers these findings by illustrating how quality mentoring relationships can have a powerful, positive effect on the educational, personal, and professional situations of participating youth. This finding is confirmed in both the qualitative and quantitative data in this assessment. Recruiting a diverse pool of mentors and carefully matching suitable mentors to youth after allowing them to meet through informal group activity provided invaluable.

Value of a Collective Impact (CI) approach. The CI approach brings together a diverse community of youth-serving agencies, community granting agencies, and the youth voice to serve as standing and ongoing network of stakeholders committed to making progress on these multilayer issues towards a clear objective, including through the pandemic. This collective impact approach also includes having 'backbone' support for the collective to orchestrate the work, coaching support to guide the work, and effective data support to measure and track progress. It also requires regularly hearing the youth voice – those with lived and living experience - through direct participation at the table, survey findings, or CAS sharing youth scenarios, to keep collective members engaged and connected to the work, and to shape the solutions to meet youth's needs. Finally, the Collective approach enabled a strong working relationship and shared objective among participating agencies, such that quick and creative solutions could be found to address barriers and provide solutions for youth, when needed, and most critically related to housing stability.

On-going need for assessment and evidenced-based decision-making. Collecting and publishing information on how youth are doing and how our initiative is working is critical in helping us understand how (and if) our programs are working. Only when we have this information and data in hand can we make informed decisions about the efficacy of new policies and project interventions; and where we might best invest our resources and efforts in supporting youth transitioning from care.

Funding flexibility. While funding flexibility is always a benefit, it was particularly needed with COVID-19 creating additional challenges. We weren't able to support as much in-person activity as we would have liked, given the health constraints, but we were able to shift some of that financial support to address youth's basic needs, such as providing food as some youth worked in the service sector and were laid off. This funding shift helped set a foundation before being able to support their Education, Employment and Training.





Pilot Reflections:

While there is much to be learned from this pilot initiative, we take the following to be some notable takeaways:

The pilot program was meant to serve as a test-case for a more holistic, participatory and collaborative approach to support youth transitioning from care. First, youth were given an active role in program design alongside collaborating agencies as well as the construction of their own goal setting. Next, the program responded to an expressed need for mentors to support youth in their journey to independence. Finally, the pilot sought to integrate the principles of wrap-around programming by supporting participating youth with goal-setting, mentorship and financial support to better enable them to achieve their desired transition goals across a range of domains; including housing, employment, educations, and skills-training, and mental and physical health. The overall goal of the pilot was to see if adopting such an approach would lead to better outcomes for youth. Here, we believe the following outcomes are reasons to be optimistic:

- Most, though not all participating youth, assumed an active role in the project; from meeting with collaborating agencies at the outset, to designing the Youth Collective Program Graphic presented here, to assuming a self-advocating role in the construction of their own transition-goal plan
- All participating youth who wanted to be were paired with a mentor with whom they identified as being very helpful, supportive, motivating, and a strong source of advice
- A large number of participating youth reported receiving assistance through the program in accessing services from across a number of different domains
- The vast majority of youth participating in this program identified as benefiting from their participation in the pilot program.

Far from definitive, the early findings lend fairly clear and consistent support for the continuation of support, funding and resourcing for these types of program interventions for youth transitioning from care.

Impacts of COVID

The time was short and interrupted by a global pandemic. We expect some youth to continue with the program, benefitting from an additional year of support.

We learned that we needed to support youth at different stages and provide all levels of supports for youth; some had more basic needs like food (particularly given COVID) and others had needs more directly related to EET. It's critical to have basic needs met, such as food, housing and mental health, to be able to pursue EET goals. We need to ensure that the available funding and programming supports this.

In person mentoring and support proved invaluable. It is difficult in a pandemic to create trusting relationships virtually. We are all more prepared for creating relationships in this way going forward, and are more prepared for youth and mentors to need support with that, and to allow relationship building to take time.





Halton Youth Collective Program - Looking Ahead

Short Term Actions and Long Term Actions

Learning from this pilot, the Halton Youth Collective Program intends to move forward with another cohort of 30 youth. We anticipate that some youth from the first cohort will continue on for a limited period, benefiting from additional time in the program, particularly given the interruptions and challenges caused by the pandemic.

We also intend to refine the program, to allow and empower the youth to make their own purchases where possible.

We're thrilled to have already identified a pool of mentors for the new youth joining the program. We also intend to hold a social event for client/mentor matching (which we hope can be done in-person). We will also use social media and the networks of the Collective member organizations to recruit new mentors for future roll-outs.

Recognizing the important role of leadership in the administration, execution and evaluation of the next iteration, the Collective also plans to appoint 1 full-time CAS staff to coordinate this work. This role will also make connections to address the biggest needs.

Long Term Actions:

New Strategy - Supporting Program Graduates:

Youth who have completed the program will have the option of continuing on with their Mentor relationship and CAS supports, and we see strong interest in this from the youth. The continuation of support aligns with the Collective's broader commitment to establishing life—long relationships with youth participants. The relationship and ongoing goal setting that will come from it are two of the three key pieces we identified as making this pilot successful. The third piece is financial support, and we are exploring options for providing one-off funding for education, employment and/or training-related needs, for graduates as well as youth not involved in the Collective program. Related to this, we aim to strengthen our housing support, enabling youth a smooth transition from housing support in the program, on the road to independent housing stability.

A Commitment to System Change:

The Collective acknowledges that many of the issues confronting Youth transitioning from care arise out of broader, systemic challenges, which were beyond the confines and scope of this pilot. Here, the Collective has called specific attention to two systemic issues; namely,

- **Housing:** Over half the youth in the pilot spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent. Additionally, the prohibitive cost of rent means that many of the youth participating in this program live outside Halton, away from their support networks and service providers. On the issue of affordable housing, the Collective will explore further advocacy for affordable housing in Halton; more funding for rent subsidies; and expanded partnership with mental health supports;
- **Employment:** The Collective recognizes that quality employment opportunities are of critical importance in these efforts. Here, the Collective recommends continued support for partnerships with Youth Employment services as well as quality job placements for youth in the program.

Thank you!

Special Thanks to our Supporters:



Designed by:

