

BRIEF REPORT ON INCOME & EMPLOYMENT

Based on the *Link* Program Evaluation Study



Link Evaluation - Overview and Methodology

For the past 25 years, Aunt Leah's Place has been providing programs for youth in foster care, teen moms, and those transitioning out of foster care.

The *Link* Program - designed for former foster youth aged 19 and older - provides: housing-related support, life skills workshops, help with resumes, job searches and applications, drop-in, emergency food and clothing, outreach and one-to-one support tailored to issues identified by each youth.

In 2012-2014, researchers from the University of Victoria School of Social Work conducted and evaluation of the *Link*. A total of 53 people were interviewed twice at 6-9 month intervals.

- 21 *Link* program participants
- 22 youth from care who had not accessed the *Link* program (comparison group)
- 6 program staff; and
- 4 support people (of the youths)

This brief report offers a summary of findings related to income & employment based on interviews with a total of 43 youth from foster care at Time 1 and 31 at Time 2.

WHAT WERE STUDY PARTICIPANTS' SOURCES OF INCOME?

Highlights of the Findings

- Over 25% of participants said they were employed. However, they were frequently working one or more part-time jobs or were employed in seasonal or labouring types of positions (e.g. roofing, landscaping, construction).
- Approximately two-thirds of participants said they relied on income assistance or disability income assistance (Persons with a Disability or PWD).¹
- Several youth reported more than one source of income, such as PWD plus temporary, short-term jobs, or student loans/bursaries, or income assistance plus child tax credit, part time work, or family support.
- The percentage of youth who cited employment as a source of income rose slightly at Time 2; two thirds were working part-time and one third said they were working full time.
- The percentage of youth who relied on income assistance or disability income assistance was relatively stable between Time 1 and Time 2.

¹ By way of comparison, according to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, in 2007/2008, 42 percent of youth who aged out of Ministry care at age 19 applied for income assistance within six months; this percentage increased to 51% in 2011. (http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/pdf/performance_2012.pdf).

Table 1: Primary income sources for youth study participants

Sources of Income	Time 1 (n = 43)	Time 2 (n = 31)
Person with a Disability (PWD)	33%	32%
Income Assistance (IA)	33%	29%
Employment (FT + PT)	26%	29%
Adult Youth Agreement (AYA)	5%	0%
Other*	2%	10%

*Other = laid off; living on savings; illegal income; unemployed + no stated income

WHAT WERE YOUTHS' EMPLOYMENT-RELATED EXPERIENCES?

Generally speaking, youths' employment experiences were limited, as many were receiving income assistance or PWD and were restricted in terms of additional amounts that they could earn. Some youth who were receiving PWD supports were part of an inner city mental health support program that provided them with very part time employment providing peer support. These opportunities afforded them a bit of additional income, along with confidence and job experience.

"I am in the peer support worker program – makes me feel better about myself. I get paid for it and I get to stay active; I feel more confident. It is a good work experience."

Moreover, even youth who were employed needed help to assist them in maintaining employment and/or making ends meet. As one youth said:

"If it wasn't for my grandmother, the money she gave me allowed me to keep my job because the money went to bus tickets."

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH FINDING AND KEEPING WORK

Youth encountered barriers to employment that compounded their lives and/or made finding or keeping working more challenging. Some of the barriers were:

- Good quality day care

"I'd like to work but I can't find a good day care where I live. There are only unlicensed day cares."

- Substance use issues

"I can't keep a job because my marijuana and alcohol use gets in the way."

- Lack of education or training

"I need to get some more schooling. More job programs would help – I need work opportunities."

WHAT DO YOUTH FROM CARE SAY IN RELATION TO WANTING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WITH EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME?

At both Time 1 and Time 2, education was the most frequently identified areas of life in which study participants said that additional support would be helpful.

Youths' comments regarding wanting additional employment-related opportunities, support and encouragement:

"I have no work, except little jobs. I've been lazy a bit and depressed - I need to get out of here. Employment is a priority for me. I'm a good worker; I just need to have a good opportunity. "

"I could use an advocate – in order to get a job."

Table 2: Study Participants' Responses Regarding "What Additional Supports Would be Helpful?"

TYPE OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WANTED	Link		CG	
	Time 1 (n=21)	Time 2 (n=16)	Time 1 (n=22)	Time 2 (n=15)
Budgeting/financial literacy	33%	0%	24%	7%
Employment	29%	19%	29%	20%
Education	19%	13%	24%	27%
Income	19%	25%	14%	20%
Legal/advocacy	29%	0%	10%	7%
Housing	14%	6%	14%	20%
Mental health	10%	0%	29%	13%
Parenting/childcare	10%	12%	0%	0%

A full report of the evaluation can be accessed at: <http://www.uvic.ca/hsd/socialwork/research/home/projects/index.php>

In summary, very few youth were employed full time and/or were working in jobs that paid them a reasonable wage. Most were relying on income assistance of some form, part-time work, or some combination of the two. The lack of employment stability may not be unusual for young people just starting out as adults, but the youth in this study were also not pursuing education or training to the same extent as their peers. Without improved education or training outcomes, their ability to find and secure, stable (i.e., not temporary or seasonal) and living wage employment may also continue to be limited.



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Paintings ("The Things We Remember" and "Toy Soldier") by Cori Creed