

SUPPORTS *to* SUCCESS

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

Intensive Support Model (ISM)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CASE MANAGEMENT AS PART OF ISM

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

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

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

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

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

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

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

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

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

GED

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

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

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

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

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

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

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



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

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

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

Housing Supports

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



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



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

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