

# Train for Trades - A Program of Choices for Youth

## St. John's, Newfoundland

PROGRAM TYPE: Support Services – Employment and Training

Across Canada, increasing numbers of young people are facing significant challenges that are forcing them into a life on the streets. Family conflict, neglect, abuse and parental substance abuse make it difficult for youth to live at home, and perhaps more importantly, to learn essential skills that will enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

In St. John's, Newfoundland, the closing of the Mount Cashel Boys Home in 1989, as the result of a physical and sexual abuse scandal, left many young men without a home and with little access to supportive services and caring relationships that all youth need to thrive.

Choices for Youth (CFY) is an organization that works with young people who have experienced, and continue to experience substantial barriers and trauma in their lives. The organization was founded in 1990, as a response to an identified need among youth, the community, and government to have an empowerment-based program available to youth. CFY provides young people with the tools and opportunities they need to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from leading healthy and stable lives.

In 2001, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), part of the national homelessness initiative funded by the federal government, developed a community plan to end homelessness in St. John's. At the time of the plan, few people were actually living on the streets on a regular basis, however there were a number of vulnerable populations who were at risk of homelessness, including young men aged 16-19, for whom there were few resources to meet their needs (IHRD Group, 2001).

Since that time, the number of homeless people has increased. Among the factors that have contributed to this increase is a 48% decrease in existing affordable private rental units (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2008). A recent survey conducted by the St. John's Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness, in partnership with the NL Statistics Agency, found 13,500 people

## KEY MESSAGES

- SERVE THE UNDERSERVED
- EMPOWER AND MOTIVATE
- THE FOUR PILLARS
- SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL
- HARD AND SOFT SKILLS
- REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE
- DATA COLLECTION AND PROGRAM EVALUATION



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are at risk of homelessness because of affordability issues (St John's Housing and Homelessness Network, 2008).

Youth-serving organizations, including CFY, began to notice an increasing number of youth not being served by available services, due to their very complex needs (for example low literacy, unstable housing, and/or addiction issues, and multiple barriers that prevented them from obtaining and/or maintaining stable, long-term employment).

In order to address these issues, the Newfoundland Housing and Homelessness Network set out a number of policy recommendations including: providing youth aged 16-24 with specialized age-appropriate programs; facilitating access to a continuum of housing, education and employment options that address their unique and specific needs; involving them in all associated decision-making processes; and supporting transitions to school and employment for young people aged 18-29 who receive Income Support and are not eligible for Employment Insurance (Pearce, 2010).

For their part, CFY recognized that in order to move young people away from income support programs and provide them with sustainable employment options, it was necessary to provide them with training and employment opportunities and at the same time to support them with a variety of social issues that would enable them to be productive employees.

The Train for Trades program at CFY was created as a means of providing employment opportunities and services to meet the needs and challenges of the most hard-to-serve homeless youth in St. John's. The idea of developing a training program that would coexist alongside other services emerged when CFY was in the process of retrofitting an industrial building to serve as a new transitional housing site. Inspired by Toronto's Eva's Phoenix program, and Youth Skills Zone, CFY employed their clients in the refurbishment of the building. The Director of CFY made a decision to learn from Eva's, which integrated employment into their Phoenix housing model, and employed youth in the building of the facility.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

CFY's Train for Trades program, founded in 2008, is a comprehensive, client-centered approach that combines employment training with several other components that are necessary to help youth get off the streets permanently, including housing, training/employment, education, and intensive personal support.

### Housing

Train for Trades began as a program that employed participants to renovate a warehouse space located in downtown St. John's, which now provides housing for youth.

### Training and Employment

The Train for Trades training program is comprised of a combination of instruction and real world, jobsite experience. Spanning 44 weeks, each round of training includes ten youth participants. During the first 2 weeks, participants complete safety training at the Carpenter's Millwright College and then begin 42 weeks of hands-on work experience. Safety training includes First Aid/CPR, Fall Arrest, Back Injury Prevention, Powerline Hazard, Ram-Set Training, Fire Extinguisher Training, Asbestos Abatement/Fit Test, Introduction to Tools and Insulation Theory. During the 42 week work portion of the program, participants are also involved in life skills training such as budgeting, how to maintain a job and essential skills training.

### *From the Classroom to the Jobsite*

Following these in-class training sessions, participants transition to real-world retrofit projects. What differentiates Train for Trades from mainstream employment programs is that at this stage, they do not transition their participants into employment within the construction industry. Instead, as a core element of their training, Train for Trades takes on contracts to retrofit a number of housing units, putting program participants to work under controlled conditions alongside externally-sourced general contractors.

In addition to working on unit retrofits, Train for Trades participants also use their new skills to give back to the community. Past projects have included building an extension to a community centre, construction of a stage at a local jazz festival, as well as work with Habitat for Humanity.

### Education

Participants are also encouraged and supported to gain educational qualifications. This support includes completing the GED preparation program that Train for Trades offers in house and right on the job-site.

### Personal Support

Many of the young people who participate in the program have never lived independently, learned how to budget, or how to overcome crises. A large number are dealing with violence, substance use issues, criminal justice issues and/or mental health challenges. Few have had the chance to learn how to cope with the ups and downs of employment, the good (pay cheques) or the bad (conflict on the job). Train for Trades features an “intensive support model”, which gives youth access to a support worker at any time for the duration of the program. This means a participant is able to contact and consult with one of the Train for Trades support workers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If they find themselves in need of support, advice, assistance, or aid, they are able to contact a youth support worker directly.

The support workers supervise participants on the job site, assist them in developing and meeting goals, and ensure that each participant is able to smoothly transition out of the program upon completion.

### Shift to Green Jobs

The second phase of Train for Trades shifted the program's focus from general renovation to green retrofitting - that is, retrofitting low-income and social housing for greater energy efficiency. The inspiration for this shift came from two sources: the Warm Up Winnipeg program and the growing issue of ‘energy poverty’ in Canada.

CFY learned from innovations in Warm Up Winnipeg's program, which like Train for Trades, employs marginalized people (in this case, Aboriginal persons involved in inner-city gangs) to retrofit houses to be more energy efficient. The focus on green jobs made sense for a number of reasons. First, people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of energy efficiency. Energy prices are on the rise, and the number of households that are devoting ten percent or more of their resources toward energy continues to grow. The concept of ‘energy poverty’ is quickly becoming a critical issue and concern across Canada. Also, as provincial and municipal governments continue to divert large amounts of resources to subsidies, as a response to rising energy costs, a case can be made that this money would be better spent on efficiency strategies, such as green retrofitting, which will help reduce consumption and total expenses over the long term.

The decision to shift the focus of Train for Trades to green jobs enabled CFY to link three key social issues: youth homelessness, unemployment and energy conservation. In a province where there is a shortage of people in skilled trades, Train for Trades plays an important role in connecting a population in need with opportunities in the construction industry. Not only does the program teach homeless youth a highly in-demand skill set, it also has the added benefit of offering a cost-saving upgrade to qualifying families at a significantly lower rate than the industry average.

# EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

## Internal Use of Indicators

Program staff have been tracking participant outcomes at the end of each term, including identifying whether participants secured employment or enrolled in post-secondary education. The following table shows the outcomes for all participants since the program began.

	Employment	Post-Secondary*	Other**
<b>Phase 1</b> (10 out of 10 participants completed program)	4	2	4
<b>Phase 2</b> (10 out of 10 participants completed program)	4	3	3
<b>Phase 3</b> (9 out of 10 participants completed program)	6	1	2
Total	14	6	9

\*Post-secondary includes the following courses: Electrician, Pipefitting, Carpentry and Crane Operation

\*\*Other includes unemployed and/or unknown

To date almost half (48%) of participants have secured employment after participating in the program, while one fifth (21%) have gone on to post-secondary education for a total of 69% either furthering their education or accessing employment as a result of participating in the program.

## Program Evaluation

In July of 2011, doctoral students from Memorial University conducted an evaluation of the Train for Trades program. The evaluation included data on participant outcomes, including education and/or employment, as well as skill development, and access to mental health or addictions services. The following data are presented in a report by Button & Keating (2011):

### Upon entering the Train for Trades program:

- 47% of youth were receiving income support through the Department of Human Resources, Labour, and Employment
- 32% had no source of income
- 3% were receiving income from the Youth Services Program, Family Services Program, and Federal Prison
- 11% were working part-time
- The average participant had only completed schooling up to grade 8

### Of the youth who completed Train for Trades Phases I and II,

- 26% secured work in trades-related fields (e.g., abatement, flooring)
- 21% pursued post-secondary education
- 10% graduated from a trades-related post-secondary program and were pursuing trades-related work
- 16% secured work in an unrelated field
- 21% were unemployed but eligible for employment insurance as a result of their completion of the Train for Trades program

### Other outcomes:

- Two Phase I participants were successful in obtaining their GED diploma.
- One youth from Phase II obtained his GED, while two youth completed the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program.
- Three youth from Phase I and II are actively participating in the Youth and Promise basic literacy program offered by the Community Youth Network.
- One youth from Phase I attended post-secondary, but has not yet completed the program, while two others from that cohort have graduated (with honours).
- Six youth from Phase III are enrolled in the GED program.
- 42% of youth who took part in the first two years of the program sought intervention or counseling for addiction.

# USER PERSPECTIVE



At the end of the second year, participants were asked to identify what it meant to them to be able to take part in the Train for Trades program. Participants reported:

"The Train for Trades program exposed me to new learning experiences and helped me develop a stronger work ethic – preparing me for the future."

"Working with Train for Trades has kept me out of trouble and brought me into a more positive lifestyle"

"Train for Trades has built up my confidence level and has made me want to succeed more in life."

"This program has given me more work experience in a field that I never thought I would have a chance to work in."

"I think Train for Trades has made me better as a person in whole – more responsible and more mature."

"Train for Trades I believe helped me manage my money and taught me the value of a dollar."

"Train for Trades changed my life completely."

"I have learned many different skills that I did not have beforehand – I have learned to be productive and responsible."

"When I complete the program I will be able to go to college and complete the trade I want to pursue. Thanks to this program I am a new person."

"This program has shown me that I need to do something with my life. It's changed my life. I don't know where I'd be without it"

"I feel like I can do or be anything I want now"

"This was one of the best things that happened to me. I made a lot of great friends and learned lots of great skills I can use in my future. It has pushed me into the trades industry and it made me proud of myself"

"It was the best learning experience I have ever been a part of"

"It was a great program for me. It helped me get back into school and gave me certificates that I never had before. It helped me deal with my anger and provided support. Thanks for help to get my life back on track"

# RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL



## Staffing

### Program Coordinator

The Coordinator is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the program; ensuring the program's philosophy, goals and objectives are met; providing staff and youth support; and research, development, and promotion of the program.

### Project Manager

The Project Manager assists the Program Coordinator with all tasks related to the day-to-day-functions of the program, including supervising program staff, supporting youth, and contributing to research, development and promotion of the program.

### Support Workers (4)

The Support Workers work with the participants on-site and off, to help develop skills and relationships. Support Workers assist the Coordinator and Manager in creating individual case plans for each youth and reviewing them regularly.

### Administration Support/Financial Assistant

The Administration and Financial Assistant provides data entry, administrative and financial management support.

## Partnerships

### CUPE Local 1860

Gaining the support of local partners like CUPE helps legitimize the program, builds a positive reputation, and lends credibility to the training and its participants. CUPE Local 1860 represents the working unions that youth who complete the Train for Trades program will likely be looking to join, following their completion of the program. CUPE's support of the program and assistance during the training stages, have been vital to participant success and will continue to factor heavily in the long-term feasibility of Train for Trades.

### Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

This government partnership has been important to the operations and structure of the program. The NLHC has been the source of all contracted green retrofit work to date, and per the terms of their contracts, has also provided support for Train for Trades projects. As well, they have signed a memorandum of agreement with Train for Trades, regarding contracting their program participants for future social housing construction projects. For Train for Trades, fostering positive partnerships, such as this one with the provincial government, has served as a means of securing funding, as well as contracted work, both of which are crucial for the long-term sustainability of the program.

### Warm Up Winnipeg (B.U.I.L.D)

Train for Trades is based on Warm Up Winnipeg's model and has been a crucial partner in the development of the program. Warm up Winnipeg continues to provide strategic advice and support.

### Carpenter's Millwright College

The college is T4T's training partner, and has provided all of the construction and safety training at a reduced rate for all of T4T's programming. This partnership ensures that participants receive the highest quality training, at a cost affordable to a non-profit organization.

### Eva's Initiatives

The original T4T model is based on Eva's Initiatives programming and therefore Eva's continues to be a valuable partner.

### Raising the Roof

Choices for Youth have long worked with Raising the Roof. Most recently, T4T was featured in a research report to raise awareness on programs for youth that help facilitate work experience and employment for young people at risk.

## Cost of program, including funding sources and budget

The program is a resource- and labour-intensive model that requires dedicated staff to make the program work. In operating a year-long program, there are also operating costs to consider, primarily associated with housing, food, training, supplies, materials, and transportation. Overall, the cost per participant for one year totals approximately \$55,000 (Pollett, 2012).

### Funding Sources

- Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
  - o Department of Advanced Education and Skills (formerly the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment)
  - o Department of Health and Community Services (Eastern Health)
  - o Department of Environment and Conservation
  - o Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation
  
- Government of Canada
  - o Human Resources and Social Development Canada
  - o Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
  - o Service Canada
  
- Raising the Roof
- TD Canada Trust
- City of St. John's
- Vale Inco
- Rio Tinto ILC
- Hibernia Management Development Corporation
- Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program – Carleton University
- Rotary Club of St. John's East
- Sisters of Mercy and Presentation Sisters
- Molson
- RBC
- Scotia Bank
- United Way of Newfoundland and Labrador



# KEY MESSAGES

## SERVE THE UNDERSERVED

Train for Trades assists youth who are often deemed unsuitable for traditional employment programs, or who have been forced to exit these programs due to barriers, such as homelessness or addiction, in their lives. Train for Trades focuses solely on assisting these underserved youth, believing that, compared to traditional models, the program is able to meet the individual needs of participants, and does not force participants to fit the program. Train for Trades takes the risk factors affecting these youth into consideration, and provides a level of service and support that is helpful and empowering for participants. Those looking to adopt a similar client-centered approach should develop their program in a similar fashion, understanding the needs of the population they are serving, and building their program model to meet those needs.

## EMPOWER AND MOTIVATE

The name “Choices for Youth” stems from a foundational belief that the appropriate response to youth who are homeless and face hardship is to give them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives; youth empowerment is at the core of everything that Train for Trades and Choices for Youth does. They believe that empowerment is critical to personal development, and that crucial to responding to youth homelessness and poverty is obtaining youth input and allowing for their involvement in the decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment is key to the youth’s sense of accomplishment, which feeds directly into their motivation. Understanding the link between empowerment and motivation and using these elements as a tool to foster development in participants is critical for anyone looking to adopt or apply the Train for Trades model to their organization.

## THE FOUR PILLARS

Four pillars (housing, employment, training, and education) that underpin the Train for Trades program. Together, these four areas of focus represent a comprehensive, sustainable, and long-term solution to homelessness. The four pillars collectively meet the needs of young people and foster positive development in their lives. No one pillar is more important than any other, and they all complement and enhance each other. Without one of these elements, maintaining the others can be difficult. For example without a roof over your head or money to pay rent and/or tuition fees, it is challenging to secure employment or to be able to attend training or education. Without training or education, finding a job or a home can be almost impossible.

## SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

For Train for Trades' youth, participation in the program is a result of the considerable barriers and issues in their lives that have kept them underserved by traditional employment programs, unemployed and at-risk. To address these barriers and issues, Train for Trades incorporates a 24/7 approach to support for participants throughout the length of the program. Support workers are qualified to assist participants with any issue, whether personal or professional, and are key to the client-centered program. Ensuring the success of similar programs elsewhere will thus require this level of intensive support for participants.

## HARD AND SOFT SKILLS

The Train for Trades training program incorporates both hard skills (job-specific skills), and soft skills (such as money management and workplace conduct), into its training regimen. This helps ensure that participants learn the skills necessary to perform well on the jobsite, as well as to manage their personal duties and responsibilities. This approach to training and education shows that while Train for Trades trains their participants to be capable labourers, they also teach them about the responsibilities of renting their own housing, maintaining employment, and dealing with difficulties and struggles outside the program.

## REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE

Train for Trades incorporates a unique jobsite component into their program. Instead of having participants complete small sample projects in a shop setting, participants tackle real work, for real money. Not only is it real work, it is work in an important, and growing field: green retrofitting. As a social enterprise, Train for Trades is awarded real contracts within St. John's construction industry. Participants take pride in their accomplishments and because of their ability to complete projects on time, on budget and on code, Train for Trades has become known for producing quality work, on par with any construction organization in St. John's. They are held accountable for their work, which is inspected by the city, ensuring the finished product is up to code.

## DATA COLLECTION AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Train for Trades staff track outcomes for all participants and also took another step in the right direction by undertaking an external evaluation of the program. Unfortunately the data reported by the evaluators was incomplete. This experience points to the need for organizations to work closely with external evaluators to ensure that the data can help the organization understand what works and what does not, and can also help demonstrate the effectiveness of a program to funders and stakeholders.

# CONCLUSION

Train for Trades has become an integral part of the St. John's community's response to unemployment and youth homelessness. The Train for Trades program helps at-risk and homeless youth overcome the economic, social, and psychological barriers that prevent them from obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment. The program utilizes a low-barrier, empowerment approach, ensuring the program is accessible to all at-risk and homeless youth, regardless of the issues present in their lives. The program offers youth an opportunity to address the issues that have kept them in a state of unemployment, to learn valuable job and life skills, and to develop positively.

The program has been successful in facilitating skill development, employment opportunities and participation in other learning programs, including post secondary education among a population that struggles to achieve these important aspects of success in life.

Though the program itself has flourished in St. John's as a result of strong partnerships between Choices for Youth and the community, there is no reason that similar linkages or partnerships could not be forged in other communities. After all, much of the program was developed by looking to other communities, seeing what approaches and models have found success in their contexts, and applying these ideas to St. John's and the needs of its youth. The ideas and concepts that permeate the Train for Trades model, including the importance of education, housing, nondiscrimination and intensive support, are not context-specific and could assist other communities in tackling the issue of rising youth homelessness in Canada.

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