

About THE WORK

Hours

Youth work Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm. They have a 35-hour work week and one hour for lunch daily. Youth are required to show up on time and ready to work including having their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). They can be excused from work to attend specific appointments (as negotiated with staff) or to attend GED classes.

Tiers

Train for Trades uses a three-tier model. This is a recent innovation and is part of the focus on making the switch from an employment support program to a social enterprise activity.

While not all youth are given the opportunity to move through the tiers, not doing so is not considered a failure. In some ways, the tiers create a graduated system in that youth who move up usually do so one tier at a time and show that they have developed necessary skills and require reduced support. However, it is possible to have successful outcomes in the program without ever leaving Tier 1.

Since one of the goals for the program is enabling youth to accrue enough hours to qualify for Employment Insurance and support to access post-secondary school/training programs some youth will move on before advancing to Tier 2.

TIER 1

Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director at Choices for Youth describes Tier 1 as “really energy retrofit, it’s really good entry-level work, it’s skilled, there is a lot of training, but it’s very repetitive work. It gives us a chance to really work with young people so they really get the skills down pat.”

Tier 1 is the entry level into the program and generally lasts about 44 weeks, although youth can stay in the program longer. There are 10 youth in Tier 1.

Tier 1 youth are paid \$11/hour. Provincial minimum wage is \$10.25 as of October 1, 2014 and increases to \$10.50 on October 1, 2015. They are given a high level of support – usually one Youth Support Worker to a team of four to six youth, plus access to one of the Youth Supports Coordinators.

Tier 1 youth do basement green retrofitting for Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation. The overall goal is to make the basements warmer for the winter, thus saving the tenant money on their heating bill.

TIER 2

When a youth is interested in extending their stay with Train for Trades and they show a good grasp of construction fundamentals, they move into the Modernization & Improvement (M&I) program. This program is also an initiative of the Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation but involves a more detailed amount of work, including exterior and interior refurbishment of an entire house.

Tier 2 youth are paid \$13/hour. They receive a reduced level of support from staff, but staff remain present when working and provide support as needed. There are 5 youth in Tier 2.

TIER 3

Youth who progress to Tier 3 become full-time employees of Choices for Youth with all the rights and benefits of any other employee, including sick days, vacation days and family leave. Their salary increases to \$15/hr. There are 5 youth in Tier 3.

Tier 3 youth work independently with contracting supervision from the Site Manager. They function effectively as a construction company bidding on projects within community, government and private sectors.

“Tier 3, our objective there is that becomes the point at which young people really can work independently. They’ve got the skills, they’ve got the drive, the motivation. We can—just like any contractor would—set them up with a set of tasks and a job to do and they can just go do it with minimal support.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The Tier model is an excellent way for youth to develop their skills. It helps youth learn the basics before moving on to more challenging work.

It may be helpful to have clearly delineated expectations to define what needs to be attained in order to progress through the tiers (see [Steps to Progress](#) at Covenant House Vancouver in Transitional Housing toolkit for an example).

The Tier 1 salary is higher than the provincial minimum wage, which provides encouragement for youth to engage with the program. Given the \$2 increase with each tier there is significant incentive to move up in the Tiers.

The Work

“We’re given a lot of experience in a bunch of different fields, so when we go out in the work force, we’ve got a bunch of experience on our hands.”

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 participant, Train for Trades.

RETROFITS

Retrofits make up the core program and provide work for the majority of the youth in T4T. Train for Trades has a contract with Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) to complete 60 retrofits annually. This work involves stripping basement walls, removing the framework and on exterior walls, reframing, filling cracks, installing insulation, vapour barrier, dry wall etc. Overall energy costs for the tenants decrease and the space becomes more useable.

MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT (M&I)

A second, newer contract with NLHC is through its Modernization and Improvement (M&I) program, which works to upgrade the condition of social housing stock. This is full on restoration of the entire building envelope.

The M&I program includes replacing roofing, siding, doors and windows. The success of NLHC’s exterior renovation program has recently allowed them to move into interior renovations, including tearing out existing walls and reframing, insulating, installing and painting new walls. In addition, new flooring is put down in the units. T4T has been able to obtain contracts for both exterior and interior work.

T4T has an initial contract for 10 units of housing. To date, four have been completed and two are nearly completed.

SPECIAL CONTRACTS

This is a newer area of focus for T4T but is key to the sustainability of the program and, in many ways, takes it back to its roots when it renovated The Lilly building. Other projects have included building a garage and a barn, installing bathrooms for the St. John’s Native Friendship Centre etc.

“If we can build things for ourselves, for our own young people, we can also build things for pretty much anyone in the community.”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

Choices for Youth is also a client of Train for Trades; in addition to The Lilly, T4T renovated the Duckworth site and has plans to build six units of affordable housing for the agency’s Rallyhaven support program shortly.

"We're given a lot of experience in a bunch of *different fields*, so when we go out in the work force, we've got *a bunch of experience on our hands*."

—Brad, age 22, Tier 2 Participant, Train for Trades



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Part of the goal in creating a sustainable social enterprise is ensuring that the program receives funding from various sources so that it is not dependent on one source of income. While two of the projects that support Train for Trades work come from the same source (Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation) they are actually funded from two different budget lines, so even if one is cancelled it is quite possible that the other will continue. T4T is increasingly bidding on and obtaining unique contracts that will help expand the scope of its work.



The central hub of Choices for Youth is the Outreach and Youth Engagement Centre.

Standards

In the construction industry there are many standards that need to be met. Train for Trades works hard to ensure that the work that is done by the youth is of high quality so that it can pass all of the city inspections. Just because the work is being carried out by youth does not mean that there is any leniency given when it comes to codes and inspections. The work must be the same quality as any mainstream construction company.

Train for Trades also wants repeat business, thus it must deliver a quality product for the various employers it works with. Construction companies thrive on repeat business and word of mouth referrals. Despite being a social enterprise, T4T wants to do quality work to meet the expectations of the people and organizations that contract it.

T4T also continually meets the requirements for the Certificate of Recognition™, which is a provincial safety standard that allows it to bid on government contracts. This will be discussed in more detail in the safety section.

“Like any business, if we don’t do good quality work and we don’t do it on time, don’t do it on budget, don’t do it on code... Every single unit of energy retrofit that we do, there’s 60 of them annually - that’s sixty inspections and somewhere around maybe three or four inspections per retrofit. That’s a lot of inspections. [We] don’t get any special lenience from [the city inspectors] around the work because we’re a social enterprise, non-profit, working with at-risk young people. We have to meet every code that the city has around our work. That’s been the deliverable for us - doing good-quality work so that we actually are seen as, ‘Wow, these are people we want to hire because they do good work, and you know what, I can also feel good about it because they’re also training and employing young people.’”

—Sheldon Pollett, Executive Director, Choices for Youth

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Organizations need to ensure they are aware of all health and safety standards related to the appropriate industries and that they do quality work that meets or exceeds these standards. While with Train for Trades this involves construction standards, a cooking program might need to meet food handling requirements. Meeting Human Resource requirements, proper financial management and general employer-employee obligations are also important.

Standards can also be understood more broadly to refer to the need to meet consumer expectations. A social enterprise will not succeed if it creates a bad product or has lousy customer service. It must meet deadlines in order to please its customer base. While consumers might go to a social enterprise once just on the merits of being a social enterprise, they will not return if they are not getting value for their money.