

Lessons Learned & RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of these lessons are scattered throughout this toolkit as Homeless Hub Thoughts. This section summarizes additional key recommendations made by staff and youth participants at Trade for Trades.

General Recommendations

- » Understand your community and the needs within in. What are the issues faced by youth in your area? What services exist already to support them? How can you create an opportunity that is unique but builds upon or expands offerings already in the community?
- » Understand the level of complexity in the population that you are targeting and develop the appropriate level of staff supports. Train for Trades uses an Intensive Case Management model to support the varied needs of their youth, including mental health issues, addictions, family breakdown, post-child welfare system, interactions with the criminal justice system etc.
- » Ensure that staff understand how to deal with conflict effectively and have good group management skills.
- » Create a quality product/deliver a quality service. You will not gain repeat business if your program does not deliver what it promises.
- » Determine what kind of program is going to provide the highest chances for later employment success for the youth. Is there a skilled labour shortage in a specific area? Do not create a construction program if there are too many unemployed construction workers already. Maybe the program could be food/catering, sewing, childcare, courier services etc.
- » Be very purposeful in developing successful outcomes for young people and delivering high quality work. Both have to be achieved for the project to be considered successful.
- » Educate potential partners and allow adequate time to bring everyone on board (i.e. union). This will ensure that everyone understands the benefits and that all fears have been addressed.

- » Start small and scale up. Learn what works and what does not. Take the time to work out any issues before trying to get too big. At the same time, plan for scale and understand that your initial resources are finite and you only have a certain amount of time to figure out how to make your program operational and sustainable. Do not simply chase funds – plan to make your program a social enterprise from the beginning.
- » Ensure you have sufficient start-up funds to cover all of the unique costs.
- » Reap maximum benefits – figure out the ways in which your program can contribute to the greater good while providing high quality supports for young people.
- » Do not lose track of the fact that this is a support program before it is an employment program. At the same time, do not forget this is an employment program and the work should be meaningful.

Construction-Specific Recommendations

- » Make safety a priority (especially for this kind of work) including proper Personal Protective Equipment training and supervision.
- » Ensure that within your staff team you have someone with the ability to manage the business side and someone with the ability to manage the project in terms of scheduling, sub-contracting, material management etc. More than a third of your time is often lost on construction projects due to scheduling.
- » Hire sub-contractors directly who understand the program and who are willing to mentor youth.
- » Have staff with a balance of youth worker skills and carpentry/construction skills, so they can manage both sides of the work.
- » Recognize and address the high start-up cost to the youth (i.e. transportation, Personal Protective Equipment, work clothes and safety equipment, etc.)

Why Do This?

- » A program such as this provides an opportunity to reduce the stigma that is often attached to youth and to people who live in social housing. It helps build a partnership with the community.
- » It gives teenagers and young adults the chance and the support they may need to better themselves. The high start-up costs mentioned above prohibit many individuals from entering the work force even if they have the skills/motivation to do so. When they are unsure about direction or how to navigate the system they often cannot get started without assistance.
- » A program that accepts applicants with significant barriers provides opportunities for young people who have been marginalized from the work force and who face challenges that are difficult to overcome. For example, many youth struggle to find employment when they have a criminal record.
- » The program creates a sense of autonomy, identity, empowerment and pride in the youth that it serves.
- » In many communities there is a significant skilled labour/trades shortage. Creating skilled employees who go on to further school or apprenticeships helps address that issue.
- » For a training institution, this program reaches an audience that might not normally be reached and gives them an opportunity to learn about and consider post-secondary education.
- » For a housing provider, it is a win in multiple areas. You are helping tenants and the organization because you are reducing long-term renovation and repair costs (i.e. due to mould prevention). At the same time, you are helping youth.



Brad, a Tier 2 participant talks about his experience with the program.