

Employment Initiatives Pilot Project Final Report

January 31, 2019

The Alex Community Health Centre

The Alex: Housing First Employment Initiative Pilot Project

Project Period: November 2017 – February 2019

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Executive Summary

For a period of 15 months, from November 1, 2017, until February 15, 2019, The Alex received funding in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness to create and pilot the innovative Pre-pre-employment Program (PEP) for high acuity, formerly homeless individuals in The Alex's Housing First programs. This report describes the activities and results of the pilot and may help to guide others who may wish to pursue a housing first employment program.

PEP provides participants with supports to prepare them for re-entry into the workforce while managing other issues (physical health, mental health, and substance abuse issues).

The goals of the project were to:

- Establish a foundation for a sustainable housing first employment program
- Implement programming using a Housing First Employment Model focused on the homeless population
- Address the gap in services for formerly homeless individuals with high acuity issues who wish to reintegrate successfully into competitive work environments.

Program structure and content were created using research, community and participant consults, and previous lessons learned. The employment program uses a semi-structured model that combines course work with one-on-one job coaching, and comprises four components delivered over a 12 month period:

- Essential Skills
- Employment Readiness
- Volunteer Placements / Competitive Job Applications
- Ongoing support

Desired outcomes are paid employment, volunteer employment, engagement in education, or achieving the "ready, willing, and able" status required to obtain further employment preparation programming.

Outcomes

Seventeen participants completed the employment program. Of these participants:

- 17 participants completed a learning plan and received a workplace certification
- 16 participants created an employment plan and participated in work experience
- 6 participants secured paid employment
- 6 participants secured volunteer employment
- 4 participants secured further education or training

Future Application

Due to competing for funding needs at the Alex Community Health Centre, the employment program will not be continued in 2019. Component of the employment program will be adapted for the HomeBase program.

In this Report

This report is written to guide others who may wish to pursue a housing first employment program.

Introduction & Background

For a period of 15 months, from November 1, 2017, until February 15, 2019, The Alex received funding in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness to create and pilot the innovative Pre-pre-employment Program (PEP) for high acuity, formerly homeless individuals in The Alex's Housing First programs. This report describes the activities and results of the pilot and may help to guide others who may wish to pursue a housing first employment program. The report begins with a description of the employment model, followed by a review of results, methods, project challenges and successes, and future applications.

Project overview

PEP provides participants with supports to prepare them for re-entry into the workforce while managing other issues (physical, mental health, and substance abuse issues). The program's goals are to:

- Ensure that partnerships are developed and maintained between The Alex and other service organizations, including employment agencies
- Manage the provision of streamlined employment services to identified Housing First clients
- Develop and increase Canadian expertise and leadership in transitioning individuals from homelessness to competitive employment
- Establish a foundation for a sustainable Housing First employment program
- Implement programming using a Housing First Employment Model focused on the homeless population
- Address the gap in services for formerly homeless individuals with high acuity issues who wish to reintegrate successfully into competitive work environments.

How this is important to our community

Employment contributes to a person's independence from institutions. Alex Housing First client incomes range from \$570 to \$1588 a month. Many Alex clients comment that this is not enough money for a survival budget. Increases in income significantly raise these individuals' buying power. Being in a Housing First program does not increase participants' likelihood of employment; additional and intentional support is required to work towards this goal.

Employment has pro-community effects. The Alex Housing First programs have been shifting emphasis on client independence. Marginalized individuals who enter employment, volunteer jobs or education have the opportunity to increase their natural supports and integrate with the general population.

PEP reduces barriers to employment by "meeting individuals where they are at," working in tandem with clients' other goals, collaborating with clients' case managers and clinicians, and using assertive engagement and motivational interviewing techniques. The program aims to bring individuals closer to employment and has a flexible approach to allow progress to be non-linear.

Participants are required to be willing to join the program, after which the program works with participants on the ready and the able pieces.

The Housing First Employment Model

The Housing First Employment Model is a “pre-pre-employment” program for Housing First clients. The program works with individuals who can see themselves working at some point in the future. Desired outcomes are paid employment, volunteer employment, engagement in education or training, or achieving the “ready, willing, and able” status required to obtain further employment preparation programming.

The gaps in service this employment program is working to address are for:

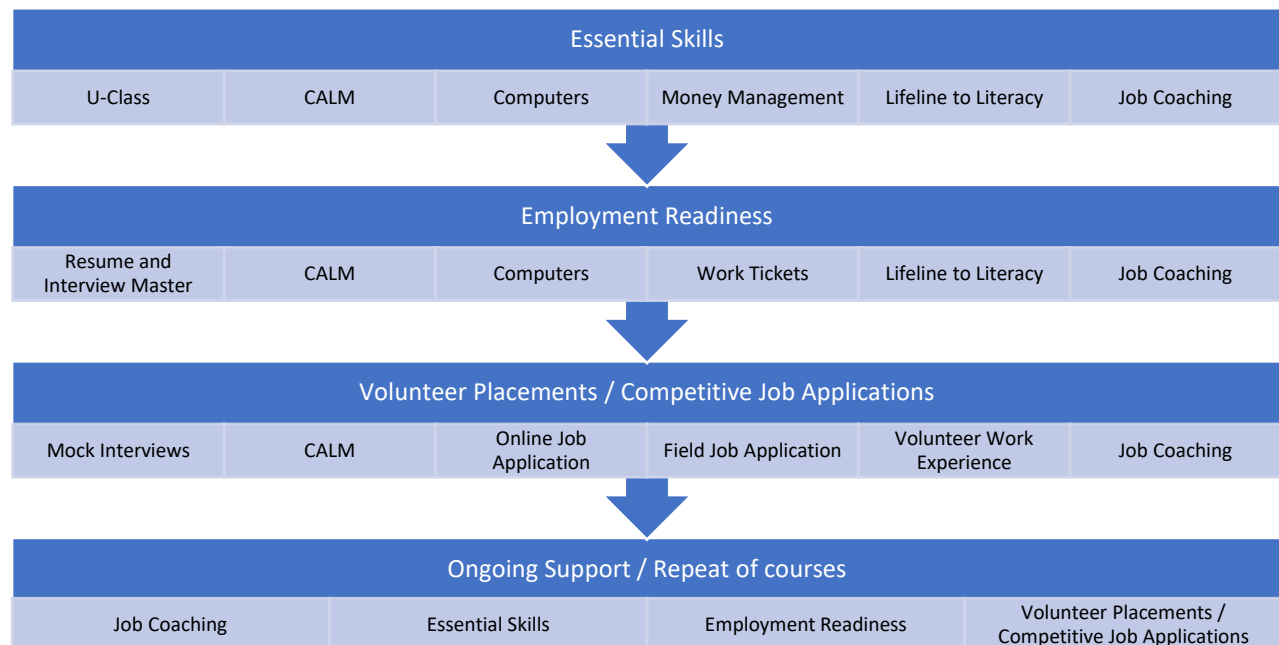
- Individuals who are interested in employment but are not “ready and able” to work
- Individuals with wavering motivation and ability to reliably participate in programming
- Individuals who are on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and would like to work part-time
- Individuals who are interested in volunteer employment, or further education
- Individuals who can benefit from programming specific to barriers due to chronic homelessness
- Individuals who would like to work their way up to attending other community employment programming

Structure

PEP uses a semi-structured model that combines course work with one-on-one job coaching. The program comprises four components delivered over a 12 month period.

The Program had two points of intake. One cohort began in January, and another cohort was integrated with the January cohort during the ‘repeat of courses’ component in September.

Weekly modules run two to three days a week with both morning and afternoon classes. Weekly classes are two hours in duration with a break. Special classes are fit into the week.



Participants

Participants were recruited from Housing First programs and the Complex Care Clinic. Each participant has a case manager or a team of clinicians. All participants are over the age of 18 with no upper age limit. Participants must be able to travel to The Alex on their own at their baseline state.

When interviewed, Alex clients who felt they were more advanced than the PEP were referred to other agencies and resources.

The employment program uses a semi-cohort style. New participant enrollment is cut off at the start of the Employment Readiness component.

Content of Classes

Please see appendix for lists of class topics and learning activities.

Job Coaching: One-on-one job coaching is conducted between the classes, allowing staff and participants to reinforce class lessons to help build the participant's learning portfolio. Participants also use this time to practice speaking about their skills and job interests. Coaching time is especially valuable for staff to help participants who have missed sessions to catch up and continue with the program. Coaching occurs on-site or in the field.

The most useful thing I learned: *Getting personalized feedback. & Help with applying for opportunities.*

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *To be organized and ready for the future*

Essential Skills

U-Class: The core class of the program. The "How to Get a Job" Stream. Participants work on self-discovery, vocational goals, and they practice speaking confidently about the transferable skills that they already possess. Participants assess how their traits, personality, interests, experience, and skills related to different jobs. They later use this information to build their personal portfolio and to guide their career trajectories.

The most useful thing I learned: *Confidence & Learning about my self-attributes that I didn't know about.*

Career and Life Management (CALM): The semi-core class of the program. The "How to Keep a Job" class. This class supports participants to develop skills that employers value, including reliability, interpersonal skills, communication, emotional regulation, and workplace culture.

The most useful thing I learned: *I loved the conversation in this class. Discussions with teacher and classmates. Also, an easier class to attend. & Time management.*

Beginner Computers: Participants who do not feel confident in attaching a file to an email are directed towards the beginner computers class, which is run by the Calgary Public Library. This computer program runs in four-week cycles and is open to non-enrolled Alex clients. The classes focus on keyboarding skills, google searching, email use, and Microsoft Word.

The most useful thing I learned: *Until this course, I admit that I was practically computer illiterate. Now I am comfortable and confident. & Typing lessons to make myself stronger.*

Intermediate Computers: Participants work to improve their computer skills in Word, Excel, Email Programs, Google Drive, and other work-related programs. Participants practice their newly acquired skills on specific projects. Participants are awarded Computer Skills Certifications when they demonstrate mastery of particular skills.

The most useful thing I learned: *I loved the volunteers that come in. I learned more in three classes than in 6 months of Microsoft.*

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *Let them know that I succeeded in bettering my knowledge of computers and my computer skills.*

Money Management: A five-week course based on the curriculum developed by Momentum that focuses on assets, budgeting, consumerism, credit, and debt.

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *This course helps us save money.*

Lifeline to Literacy: Participants improve their reading, writing, and math skills in a foundational learning program led by a Bow Valley College instructor.

The most useful thing I learned: *Finding out I had ADHD*

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *If they have troubles with literacy – writing, spelling reading – Take the class.*

Employment Readiness

CALM, Beginner Computers, Intermediate Computers, Money Management, Job Coaching, and Lifeline to Literacy continued.

Résumé and Interview Master: 1) Participants create a comprehensive résumé that can be amended for each job they apply for. Further classes work with participants to tailor their résumé to specific jobs; 2) Participants learn, develop, and practice interview and networking skills.

The most useful thing I learned: *I would have to say, to have a resume done right for the first time in 20 years.*

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *Yes, everyone needs help on their resume. Anyone who is trying to obtain employment during recovery.*

Tickets and Certificates: Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), First Aid and CPR, Customer Service Skills, Assertive Communication, ProServe, and job-specific tickets can be earned by participants.

The most useful thing I learned: *Everything in the certificate course was valuable. It gives us something tangible to add to our resumes.*

Volunteer Placement and Competitive Job Application

CALM, Job Coaching, and Money Management continued.

Mock Interviews and Networking: The class begins with participants reading job descriptions critically and preparing for the mock interview. In the second part of the class, participants meet with an employer to complete a mock employment interview. The employer begins by discussing their hiring

process and interview style. The employer then asks the class their go-to interview questions and provides feedback.

The most useful thing I learned: *I was terrified of interviews in the beginning. It has been hugely beneficial to hear interviewers show their vulnerability and admit they've felt fear of interview themselves. & What questions I should ask the employer to be prepared before an interview.*

Volunteer Work Experience: Participants get a chance to demonstrate and practice their transferable skills by volunteering with various employers around the city. The participants have an opportunity to gain a new reference from the hosting employer and an up to date experience on their résumé.

The most useful thing I learned: *By going as a group, I know what to expect. This helps with anxiety. & To be a volunteer at a job that I could hold down one day. & How to work with others.*

How and why would you recommend this to a friend?: *To build real skills. & I felt more at ease with my team, they helped me take the step.*

Computers and Online Job Applications: Participants research a job they would like to apply for online. They work with staff to tailor their résumé and cover letter and may choose to submit an application. Those who complete early have an opportunity to work on a computer skill of their choice.

The most useful thing I learned: To put something together correctly that may attract a future employer.

Ongoing Support and Repeat of Classes

Field support: A class for participants who are ready to work. The job coach works with participants to apply for work in person as well as to support participants before and after their interviews.

The most useful thing I learned: *To be encouraged to enter the real world but not alone*

A repeat of courses: Participants who are not ready to work can continue to take PEP courses.

Holiday Employment Program

From August until December, PEP accepted new intakes for an accelerated version of the program that targets increased work opportunities that are available during the holiday season. The model is the same, but each component has been condensed into a one-month period. The new September cohort joined the original cohort that started in January.

- August – Intakes
- September – Essential Skills
- October – Employment Readiness / Volunteer Placements
- November – Volunteer Placements / Competitive Job Applications
- December – Ongoing support

Records

Daily notes are taken on program participation in both modules and job coaching. Notes are recorded to the information system that matches the participant's main program.

Graduation Requirements

- Completion of a module (U-Class, CALM, Computers)

- Complete and updated resume
- Acquired a skills certificate
- Participation in volunteer work experience
- Intent to work/volunteer/go back to school

Results

Outcomes

As of January 22, 2019

	Original Cohort /11	Holiday Cohort /6	Total /17
Participant regularly attend training blocks	11	5	16
Participant creates a learning plan	11	6	17
Participant creates an employment plan	11	5	16
Participant acquires workplace certificates	11	6	17
Participant completes training component	11	5	16
Participant enrolls in further education or seeks to enter paid employment or volunteer employment	11	6	17
Participant placed in work experience placement	11	5	16
Participant secures paid employment	5	1	6
Participant secures volunteer employment	5	1	6
Participant secures further education and resources	2	2	4
Participant retains employment after three months	3	0	3

Participant comments on outcomes

- *This class impresses me every day. I have done so many things I would never do alone.*
- *I am happy with who I am shaping into and with the results.*

Other Measures

Client Recruitment and Retention

PEP has 17 graduating participants in from its two cohorts.

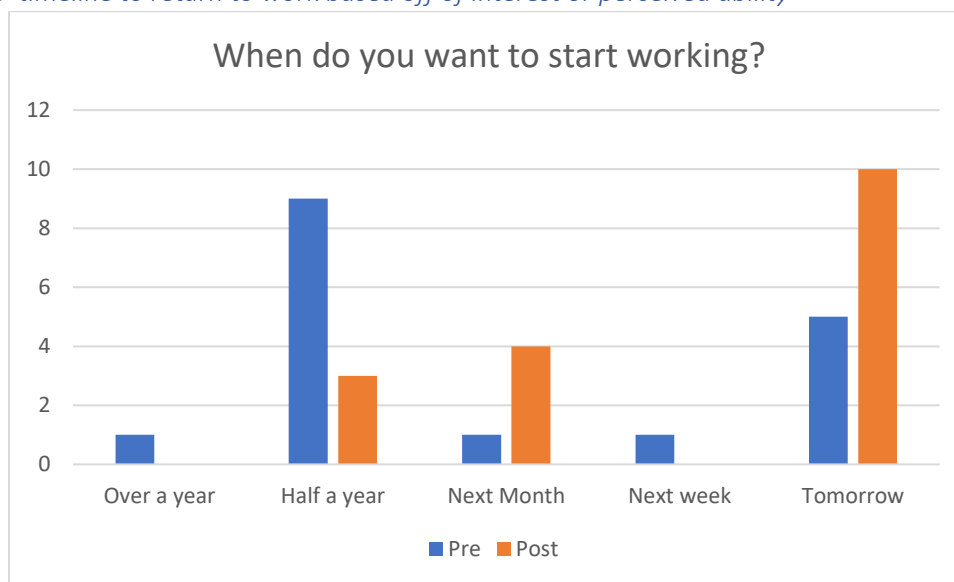
Original Cohort

- Alex clients who indicated interest in employment programming and filled in an exploratory survey – 41
- Alex clients who completed intakes for January start – 24
- Alex clients who participated in at least one class – 19
- Alex clients who remain in the program – 11

Holiday Cohort

- Alex clients who indicated interest in employment programming and filled in an exploratory survey – 10
- Previously 'dropped out' Alex clients who re-entered program - 4
- New Alex clients who completed intakes for September start – 6
- New Alex clients and Alex clients who re-entered who remain in the program – 6

Participants' timeline to return to work based off of interest or perceived ability

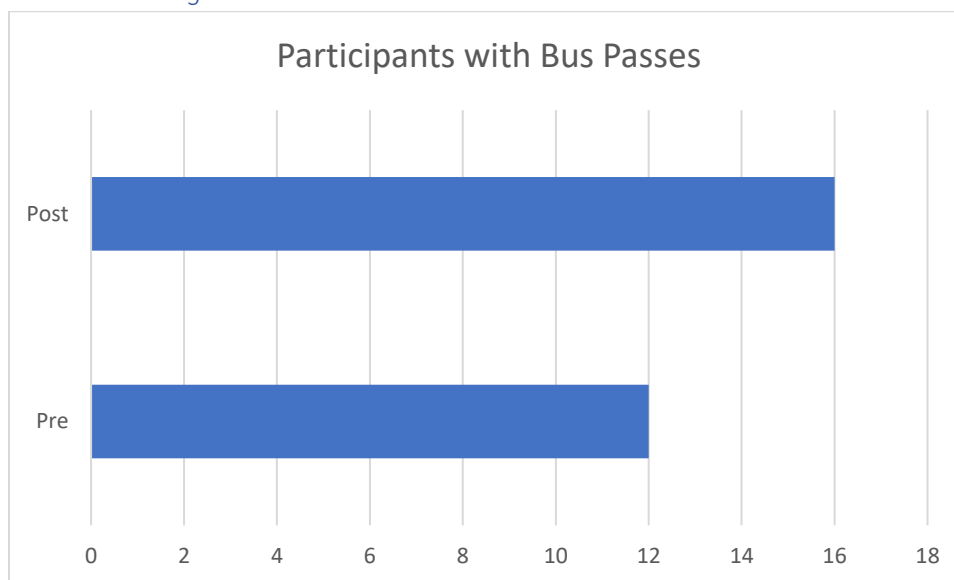


At intake, participants were asked when they would like to start working. The majority of participants indicated six months or longer, with another cluster of participants indicating they would like to start working as soon as possible. The duration of the PEP program ranged from four months to one year. At the post-program survey, the majority of participants indicated they would like to start working tomorrow. The shift in the participants' timeline is in line with the duration of the 4-12 month program however it is worth considering the participant's workplace displacement.

The participants' workplace displacement prior to the program ranged from 3-23 years, with the average being 8 years. A number of participants have had interest in working during this time of

unemployment and had a stagnant timeline to enter employment over the duration of these years. A possible effect of PEP on participants is a shift of employment goals from long term to short term.

Community Access and Integration



Bus Passes

Participants purchase bus passes more regularly since the start of this program. All participants reported that transit was their main method of transport. Bus passes are vital for the participants to independently get to job interviews and to work.

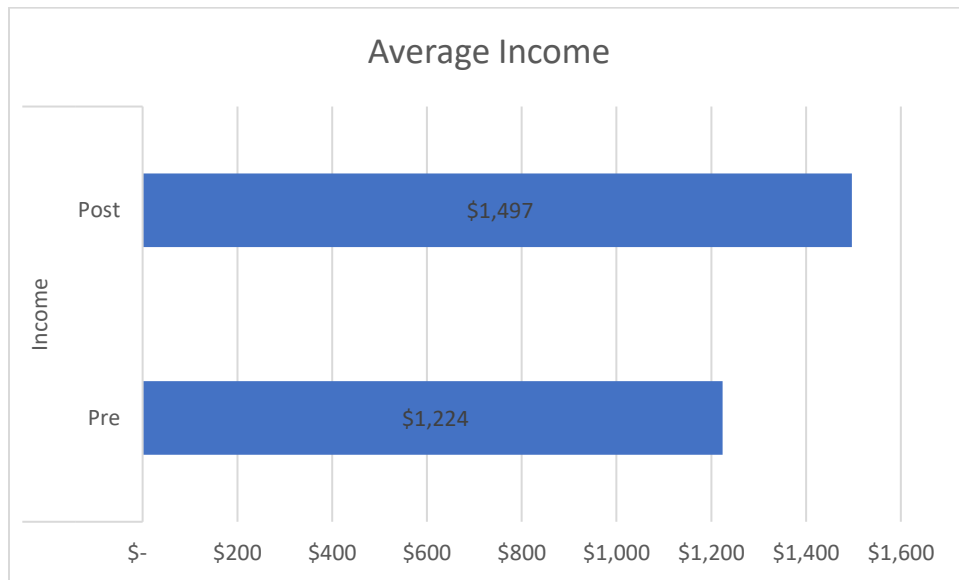
Calgary Bus passes are offered to low-income Calgarians on a sliding scale. The participants who were not purchasing bus passes prior reported it was because on most months the bus pass cost the same as if they were to purchase individual tickets. These participants also reported that not having a bus pass often limited their choices on what groups they came to, places they went, and the community resources they used.

The schedule of the program required increased participant's use of transit. Participants received monthly rewards contingent on them purchasing bus passes early in the month. After the program's completion, participants have continued to regularly purchase bus passes.

Social isolation

Participants were asked before and after the PEP program how often they left their house. Although there was much individual movement on these numbers, the average was the same. Some participants reported that they are benefiting from staying at home more because they are not associating with negative supports. Other participants' caseworkers have reported that the participants have been leaving the home more, this resulted in a reduction in conflict.

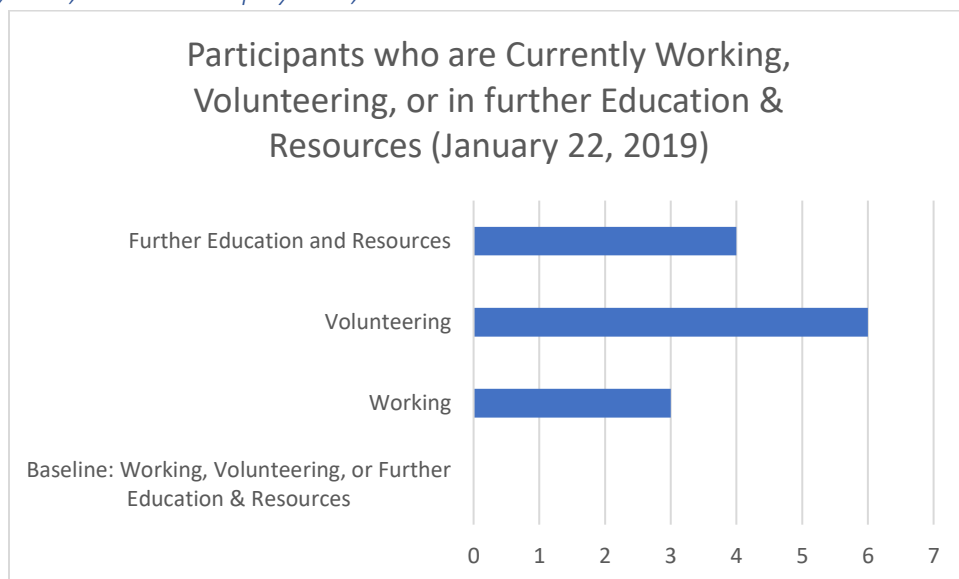
Income

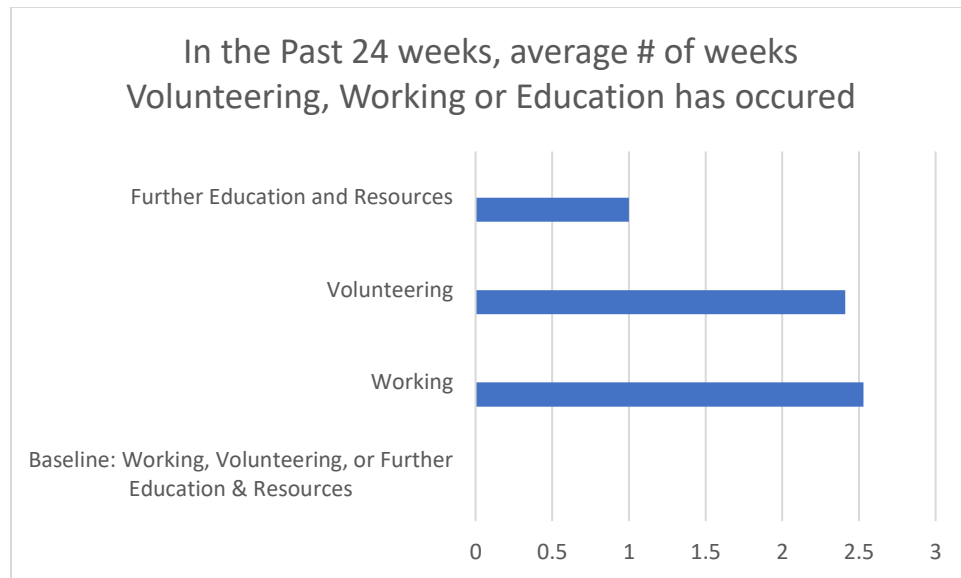


Prior to the program, the participants' average monthly income was \$1224, with two clusters within the group. Cluster A were those who are on Alberta Works earning on average \$700 a month, and Cluster B were those who are on AISH, Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), and Old Age Security (OAS) who averaged \$1590 a month. After the program, the average monthly income is \$1497, with Cluster A earning an average of \$971 a month and Cluster B earning an average of \$1865. The income results have been adjusted for the increase in AISH rates in January 2019.

Participant income goals varied based on their source of income. Older participants who were receiving AISH, CPP, and or OAS preferred to limit their income to the maximum income exemption, or preferred to go into volunteer work. Younger individuals receiving Alberta Works preferred to pursue training for future careers, or for applying for full-time employment.

Paid Employment, Volunteer Employment, and Further Education and Resources





[Paid Employment](#)

At the time of this report, three participants are working. Those who are working are participants who gained employment with temporary agencies and aim to earn the AISH maximum income exemption. For those who had and lost employment, reasons for loss of employment included company fit, the job was eliminated, and mental health concerns.

Rejecting job offers was an unintended success. Participants rejected job offers for a variety of reasons including the job violated worker's rights, the job was a scam, and the job duties did not fit with their mental and physical well-being. Participants were shown how to report scams and workers' rights violations to labor boards.

[Volunteering](#)

Six participants secured volunteer positions. Some participants who are seeking fulltime work found volunteer positions in their field of choice. Participants whose main goal was volunteering found positions that worked well their mental health and physical barriers

[Further Education and Resources.](#)

PEP is a Pre-Pre employment program for individuals who were interested in working, volunteering, or going back to school someday. Calgary has strong employment resources for those who are ready, willing, and able. Participants who were interested in further employment resources were given warm transfers¹ to other programs around the city. Other participants furthered their skills in knowledge in specialized courses such as self-employment programs.

¹ A warm transfers is when a staff member from one organization who has a pre-existing relationship with an individual introduce this person to staff from another organization.

Self-Efficacy



A strength of PEP is the program's ability to support its participants to increase their self-efficacy. Participants reported this was because the classrooms are small, they are among their peers, items are broken down into manageable and guided steps, and participants knew they are welcome back should they need to leave.

Participants reported an increase in confidence in finding a job independently, and an increased feeling of ability if they started their job in the near future. Participants reported a reduction of stress when they are looking for work.

Reliability and Accountability

When the volunteer mock interviewers were asked what the most important trait in an employee, the overwhelming answer was reliability. PEP staff worked with participants to practice this skill by coaching and assertive engagement.

Reliability scores were determined monthly by:

$$\text{Classes Attended} - (0.25 \times \text{Classes Late})$$

Classes signed up for

And accountability scores were determined monthly by:

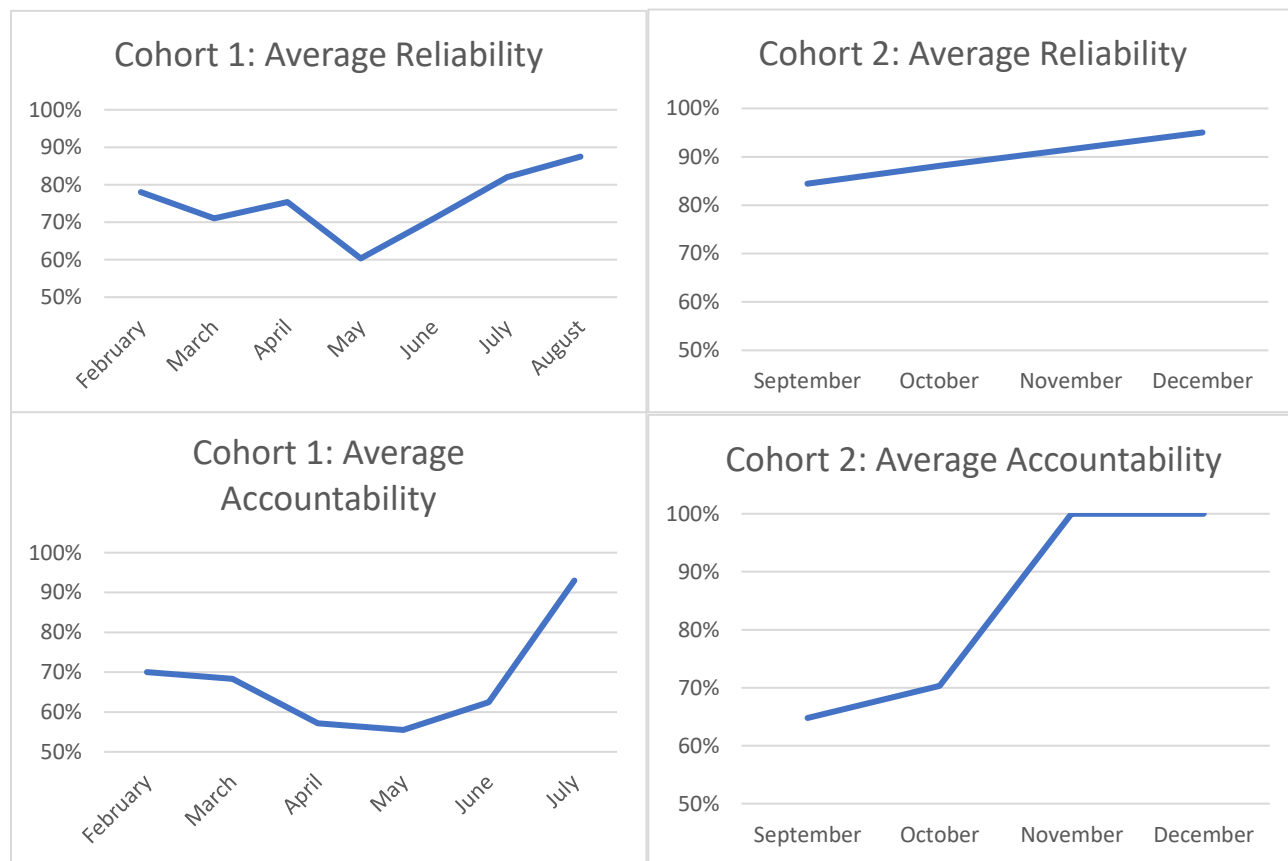
Excused Absences

Classes Missed

Excused absences are absences that participants informed PEP staff about. The amount of advanced notice required was based on the participant's ability.

Reliability and Accountability feedback was given to participants. Participants worked on signing up for classes that fit their interests and their schedule and creating a habit to be at their assigned classes.

Trends in participant reliability and accountability increased in both the January and the September Cohorts.



Attendance

The PEP program was well attended. 215 classes and 133 job coachings were offered with 1078 PEP participant Attendees. Some classes and coachings were open to non-PEP attendees.

PEP Attendance Information

January 15, to December 17, 2018

Classes			
	Average Attendance Employment Participants	Average Attendance All Clients & Staff- Participants	Total # of Classes
Ongoing Courses			
U-Class	6.7	9.0	19
CALM	5.0	5.3	31
Intermediate Computers	4.4	5.0	33
Beginner Computers	2.7	3.5	11
Lifeline to Literacy	2.0	4.6	28
Money Management	1.0	2.8	17
Resume & Interview Master	7.9	8.3	11
Mock Interviews	5.9	5.9	11
Work Experience	5.6	5.7	18
Certificates	5.1	5.3	11
Special Activities			
Alberta Works Talk	5.0	5.0	1
AISH Talk	9.0	17.0	1
First AID	8.5	10.5	2
Safe Food Handling	4.0	11.5	2
Criminal Record Talk	6.0	15.0	1
Reference Class	7.0	5.0	2
Haircuts	5.0	10.0	1
Job Fairs / Applications	3.0	3.0	8
Graduation	10.0	35	1

Participants' motivation to participate

- *I just finished a mental health program at the hospital. This kept me stable and secure*
- *I found motivation in the people and the classes. How it all was just so great!*
- *Certificates, particularly because they were free*
- *To pursue a career in volunteering or paid employment*
- *My low education*
- *Getting out of the house*
- *Gift Cards*
- *I learned things that I need to know*

Certificates

PEP participants accumulated 71 workplace certifications including

- Safe Food Handling
- First AID & CPR
- WHMIS
- Customer Service Skills
- Assertive Communication
- Pros-Serve
- Microsoft Office
- Microsoft Excel

Participants' comments on what 'success' means to them

- *Knocking off goals and having fun doing it!*
- *Being myself, knowing my own superpowers and excelling in the things I want in life*
- *Working with others that you get to know as friends*
- *Stability*
- *Consistency, Motivation*
- *Looks like we have a purpose and ready to take our skills higher*

Community members comments on the program

- *Great community involvement*
- *Great emphasis on confidence building*
- *This program connects housing health and employment*

Methods

Program and Program Content Development

To achieve the stated objectives, the Housing First employment program was created by the combination of expectations, research, housing first client surveys, best practices, community consult, client consult, and lessons learned.



Research

Two literature reviews were completed: *The Relationship between Homelessness and Employment for Formerly Homeless Individuals*, and *A Review of Best Practices in Supported Workforce Re-Entry*.

The Relationship between Homelessness and Employment for Formerly Homeless Individuals

The articles used for this literature review were collected using a combination of keywords including “Homelessness, Employment, Employment Support, Housing First, Canada” Databases and websites used were Homeless Hub, Google Scholar, University of Alberta Library. Article abstracts were reviewed for relevancy. Relevant articles were fully reviewed. Other articles used in this literature review were found in references in the original article or articles that have cited the original article. These articles included government documents and non-government organization reports. The literature review used 31 of the articles that were most relevant to the topic.

A Review of Best Practices in Supported Workforce Re-Entry.

Information for this review was compiled from government websites, employment support websites, and peer-reviewed articles. Interviews with industry professionals directed which government and employment support websites to target. The review used 16 articles that covered local and global strategies.

Calgary Employment Resource Catalog for Alex Clients

The Calgary employment resource catalog was compiled by four sources of information:

- The Community and Social Services (CSS) Calgary Region Employment, Training and Career Services Directory (Pre-Employment Programs, Workplace Training,
 - www.humanservices.alberta.ca/services-near-you/2433.html)
- InformAlberta Employment Directory - Employment Support Services
 - www.informalberta.ca
- InformAlberta CAA - Participating CHF Supportive Housing Programs and Services directory as a resource for housing first websites. The CHF Housing First websites were checked for employment programs
 - www.informalberta.ca
- Calling and meeting with programs to learn more about their employment program offerings.

As of December 2017, Calgary had 37 employment programs from 24 agencies that fit our client demographic. These programs ranged from Internet resources to full-service placement agencies.

Housing First Client Survey

A Housing First Client Survey was created to assess the needs of The Alex Housing First client population. Employment staff created both open-ended and closed-ended questions based on needs stated through research. Alex case managers and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team members were educated on the survey and employment program. The case managers and ACT team worked with the program coordinator to target Alex clients who might be interested in the program. Case managers and ACT team members administered the surveys to Alex clients.

Best Practices

Best practices were identified by interviewing community employment specialists, employers, interagency meetings, and other Alex staff members.

Three agencies, the Calgary John Howard Society, The Drop-In Centre, and The Mustard Seed, provide employment programming to client populations similar to those of Alex Housing First program. Structure of the programming, content, skills tickets and certificates available, and employer partnerships were reviewed. Components of these programs were adopted into the PEP model.

Employers were interviewed to learn what factors are most influential in their hiring decisions. Employers were asked questions on disclosure, training certificates, what makes a good employee, how criminal records impact their hiring decisions, employment program partnerships, experience with workforce displacement, references, technology, inclusive hiring practices, and anything else they would like potential employees to know. Employers shared this information with participants during Mock Interviews. This information was compiled into a handbook for the participants.

Calgary has a strong community of support for employment programs and resources, including monthly community resource meetings hosted by Alberta Works, Government of Alberta. Each meeting involves two or three presentations on different employment resources in the city. Some presenters speak about their methods and their results. The Community Resource Meeting also has a round table discussion regarding current events and upcoming resources. Information learned during these meetings resulted in stronger resource referrals during the employment program coaching and classes.

The employment program used best practice resources from Alex staff and policies. The employment program adopted the recreation programs' risk management system, including policies on staff-client ratios, waivers, emergency contact protocol, and incident reporting.

Community Consults

Community employment stakeholders were contacted and recruited to join the Community Advisory Group. The group consists of employment professionals, adult learning professionals, employers, and mental health professionals who meet quarterly to review progress evaluate barriers and give suggestions for future directions.

Client Consults

Participants met quarterly to give formal feedback about the program. Participants also gave ongoing feedback during coaching sessions, and during class time.

Class Content

Class content was flexible and adjusted to participants' needs. January to August class content was created two to three weeks in advance. This allowed participants to request and receive topics in a timely manner. Each class was evaluated by employment staff who determined what content to use in the September to December classes.

Project Challenges and Successes

Challenges

Attendance

Attendance is essential to practice work skills in a group setting. The employment program staff practice assertive engagement to support individuals to be present in classes and appointments.

Job coaching: To encourage regular use of job coaching, participant rewards were given out during coaching sessions. Participants are compensated for a portion of their travel costs to PEP, participants who attend classes regularly are eligible for a gift card once a month.

Summer: Attendance declined during the summer. Employment staff worked harder in assertive engagement during this time, including the introduction of attendance rewards in class.

Last week of the month: Attendance is lower during the last week of the month. Employment staff has learned to not place critical events or announcements during this time.

Feedback: Participants receive regular feedback on their reliability and accountability for classes. This supports the participants to be more mindful for the courses they sign up for, which can be transferred to being mindful of what shifts they agree to take at a job. Staff also work with the participant to increase notice given when they require to cancel an appointment.

Problematic Behaviours

Participants display a large range of prosocial and antisocial behaviors. Some participants exhibit behaviours that are disruptive, offensive, dangerous, and triggering. Employment staff work with participants to shape their conduct in the class towards work appropriate behaviors. The class structure is flexible to allow participants to practice self-care in order to avoid escalation.

Disruptive: Class expectations and time out training occurs at the beginning of the program. When participants are disruptive, the class facilitator refers to the expectations for correction. The participants also practice “timeouts” regularly. A “place anything in your hands down” rule was added to the “time out” practice to support individuals who are unaware that some objects appear threatening when paired with an elevated conversation.

Offensive: Participant personalities clash regularly. Part of the diversity in this group is used as a practice for “how to get along with coworkers you do not like.” Instances of these clashes increased the program’s strategies to work with the conflicting parties. the following strategy has proven effective:

- (i) The conflicting parties are met with one-on-one in a timely manner to discuss what behaviors were problematic in each situation.
- (ii) Individually, both participants come up with solutions to the situation that works for them.
- (iii) The participant and the staff discuss if the participant needs to leave for the duration of the class.
- (iv) The situation is later compared to a work scenario. Participants are asked to visualize how this can be handled at work, who they would report the issue too, and what the appropriate level of follow up is.

Dangerous: Some participants act out their frustrations through behaviour. Participants who exhibit behaviour that threatens harm to someone are asked to leave for the duration of the class. Participants must meet with employment staff before they can partake in their next modules. Some extreme behaviours have led to “suspension with pay,” which means they are not allowed to participate for a set amount of time but are given homework to stay on track.

All incidents are tracked with The Alex incident reporting system.

Triggering: The majority of the participants we work with have anxiety that can be disruptive. Some problematic behaviours with other clients cause an influx of anxiety in others. The program works to balance participants’ needs and realities. In response to those who are

triggered by disruptive participants, staff quickly remove disruptive participants from class. Employment staff also work on a self-care plan with individuals who appear elevated during class.

Cancelling Classes

Peer Support – Participants did not attend the formal peer support module. This is not unusual: staff from other employment programs commented on the low interest in their own peer support activities or “job clubs” which they attributed to the loss of interest once a participant has secured employment. Due to this, the PEP Job Club was cancelled. Peer support activities were added to existing classes with positive results.

Two Tiers for Work Experience

Participants vary on their readiness and ability level to carry out work. Some participants require more support, easier workload, and a less chaotic environment. This was learned after a few participants became disruptive during work experience. After working with the situation, employment staff attributed this to the disruptive participants’ inability to focus for very long. In response, two tiers of work experience were introduced: *Tier one*: Low consequences, closer to the Community Health Centre, the ability to leave if needed. These include experiences such as Kitchen support, janitorial work, advisory groups, and mail outs.

Tier two: Community work experience, located in hiring organizations with more rigid rules. These include experiences such as the Drop-In Centre (DI) Warehouse, The TELUS Spark, and Fort Calgary.

Participants who exhibit problematic behaviour in tier one Work Experience are suspended from Work Experience. The participant can rejoin work experience after they create a plan with employment staff.

Splitting Resume class

In September, the classes rebooted. Some participants of the original cohort wanted to continue with class. Most classes developed skills that are productive for repeat participants. However, resume writing classes were repetitive for those who already had completed resumes.

Employment staff responded to this by creating a split during these classes. All participants are together for announcements, peer support, and lesson portion of the class. When the résumé activity started, participants with a résumé met with other staff to research and apply for jobs.

Successes

Volunteer work experience

Participants were able to advocate for their cohort and for themselves through volunteer work experience. Participants learned what they enjoy doing and what they do not. They were able to collect references and work experience.

Work experience was a great opportunity to see the participant's skill sets. Some participants who struggled in classroom settings have excelled in this module.

PEP has been applauded for participants' work ethic. TELUS Spark specified that this program was "[the] best corporate groups that we've had in quite some time (which means a lot)" Other organizations appreciated the work done and offered more opportunities.

First Aid & CPR

An unintended effect of First Aid and CPR certification was that the participants successfully used this training to revive their peers. Two participants reported the use of CPR since receiving the training.

The first aid training was also helpful during class. A medical emergency occurred during class and participants responded promptly and professionally. The incident was also used to discuss how to handle a first aid emergency in a work setting.

17 employment program participants completed their first aid.

Literacy Awareness

Some of the participants in our program have both assessed and non-assessed literacy barriers. The program works to be accessible for individuals with low literacy.

Lifeline to Literacy: Lifeline to Literacy is a weekly module for individuals who struggle with elementary reading, writing and math skills. Literacy Experts from Bow Valley College facilitate this program.

Literacy Awareness and Plain Language Training: Employment staff were trained by Calgary Learns in literacy awareness and support tactics. These learnings were used in the creation and modification of training materials.

Multiple modes of teaching: Each class involves content that is delivered both verbally and in writing.

In-Class Literacy Support: The Lifeline to Literacy facilitator joined the program for an additional class each week to support individuals with low literacy to complete the employment workbooks or write a resumé. This is crucial as some of the behavioural outbursts that have occurred thus far over the course of this project can be traced to shame about literacy barriers.

Flexibility

Some participants missed many sessions due to their personal challenges. The class format is flexible enough to welcome these participants back when they are ready to reengage. This flexibility has helped us support nine participants to re-enter the program.

What I would do differently

- Have the participants' rewards and privileges outlined and given to participants at intake.

- Have graduation requirements outlined at intake.

What advice I would give to another group doing a similar project

Working with participants

- Be prepared to work with people where they are at. Progress with participants is not linear. Sometimes employment is not the most pertinent goal for them. When this occurs, stay open and welcoming.
- Keep strong communication with the participant's case management team. Keep them updated with what the participant is working on. Inquire with the participant's case manager if the participant is acting differently or has stopped attending. Create a plan with the case managers to tackle barriers that come up with the participants. Also, ensure you are on the same page with the case manager to avoid "triangulation." Triangulation can occur when a participant has more than one system of care. The participant can misinform the different systems of care in order to fulfill a goal.
- If you are unsure if a participant will be work ready, wait for the work experience component. A few of the participants shocked me with their work ethic.
- Give participants calendars each month and notes that indicate what they have signed up for. Some participants had troubles memorizing their schedule.

Consistency

- Even the most well-advertised class will not have full attendance on the first day. Our participants thrived when the class times were consistent. Participants did well when they were able to make coming to the employment program at specific times into a habit.

PEP Participant Advice

Future Participants

- This class is Real, Raw, and Incredible. I felt that I could be myself without judgment.
- Be persistent, Stick to it, go to every class.
- To anyone who wants or thinks they want to work. There is support and community.

Future Facilitators and Programmers

- Be honest and straight forward.
- Get participants back on the path
- Be Positive

Potential Funders

- This class has kept my sanity. Improved my confidence to a point that I would not have believed could happen.
- The program has changed my life, body, mind, soul.
- This program helped me overcome my fears of getting back into employment.
- The trust and experience I have are priceless.
- I found the intimate small classroom format better than another pre-employment program I've tried.

- This program is necessary because we are different from society. E.g. Bipolar.
- I found the PEP format less intimidating as a vulnerable woman.
- Great class for people who have been unemployed or never had a job and looking to upgrade skills in the workplace.
- Come on down, you could be the next contestant in PEP. The door is always open. Come visit.
- Your funding goes to good places.

Future Applications

Sustainability

The Alex Community Health Centre does not intend to continue this project once funding has ended due to competing for financial needs. The cost of the program is not sustainable for this organization.

Pieces of the project can be used as a tool by case managers to support their clients who have employment goals. A tool kit and education materials are available to case managers who have a use for them.

Value

Although the employment program will not be continued, value has come from this project

Organizational – A greater understanding of the role of employment programming in the recovery model.

Community Partners – A stronger partnership with Bow Valley College has led to the increase presence of a literacy facilitator at The Alex. A new partnership with Workday has increased the accessibility of computer support for Alex clients. Workday is a computer software company that has encouraged staff to volunteer and support their community. Partnerships with other employment programs can allow participants cheap accesses to certifications.

Tool Kit – Organizations that are interested in starting an employment program can take advantage of the learnings from this program

Education Materials – Program modules for CALM and U-Class have been created into workbooks that clinicians and case managers can use one-on-one with their clients

Advocacy – Employment program participants acted as great representatives of their demographic to different organizations.

Participants – Individuals are working, volunteering and receiving further education. They are accessing resources that they were not aware of before.

- Completed a 750 piece mail out in two hours for a wonderful organization that supports women in need
- Prepared the apartment to be move-in ready for a family in need.

August 2018 – November 2018

TELUS Spark

Calgary, Alberta

Block Cleaner

- Hand scrub the foam blocks with disinfectant soap
- Ensure blocks were presentable for the public by rinsing them clean and stacking them to dry
- Ensured a tidy and clean work area
- Ensured a safe and tidy area so that other staff may move in and out
- Participated in a tour of the facility

Display Assembly and Disassembly

- Created an enriched display for the Shocktober Event
- Used attention to detail and fine motor skills to support the creation of a permanent installation in a Gallery
- Ensured to adhere to safety procedures during the dismantling of the seasonal displays

Accomplishments

- Worked as a team to clean two bins of blocks in one afternoon
- Commended by the Volunteer coordinator as “One of the best corporate groups that we’ve had in quite some time”

June – October 2018,

Community Kitchen

Calgary, Alberta

Kitchen Hand

- Worked directly with the Kitchen Manager on multiple food programs
- Worked on the programs from the planning stage to clean up
- Ensured a clean and sanitary environment for staff and patrons
- Performed weekly cleaning duties
- Used strong communication skills to ensure a cohesive flow of work for a team of 7 individuals
- Learned new kitchen skills on the job quickly and effectively
- Planned future menus

Accomplishments

- Supported the soft launch of the Morning Café by planning, marketing and providing a positive experience for 10+ Patrons
- Supported a team BBQ of over 50 patrons

June – November 2018,

Drop-In Furniture Centre

Calgary, Alberta

Labourer

- Sorted and folded donated clothing
- Organized and put donated hygiene items on display
- Worked on a team to move large pieces of furniture

June 2018

Fort Calgary

Calgary, Alberta

Surveyor – Walk of Reconciliation

- Worked on a team to complete post-event surveys for the Walk of Reconciliation event
- Approached guests in a calm and inviting manner
- Took accurate a coherent notes on guest’s responses

Accomplishments

- Worked on a team that was able to convince and survey one-third of the event's attendees
- Supported the development of Calgary's Walk of reconciliation

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATES

February 12, 2018	Alberta Health Services	Calgary Alberta
Safe Food Handling		
June 4, 2018,	St. John Ambulance	Calgary Alberta
Emergency First Aid and CPR-A		
June 12, 2018,	Safe and Sound	Winnipeg, Manitoba
WHMIS – 2015 GHS		
June 18, 2018,	Achieve Centre	Calgary Alberta
Customer Service Skills		
June 27, 2018,	Achieve Centre	Calgary Alberta
Assertive Communication		
July 5, 2018,	AGLC	Calgary Alberta
ProServe Liquor Staff Training		

Class Topics and Learning Activities

U-Class

- Team Building
- Learning Styles
- Goal Setting & Image Board
- Class rules
- Values Inventory
- Transferable Skills, Transferable skills of a bottle picker
- Interest Inventory
- The Nine essential skills
- Personality Inventory
- Jobs that match your personality, interests, skills, values
- Job Plan

Resume and Interview Master

- Elevator Pitch
- Resume
- Cover Letter
- How to Ask for a Reference
- Interview Questions
- Interview Etiquette
- Staying Positive

Mock Interviews

- Multiple employers come in to discuss their hiring style and ask their go-to interview questions to the group
- Speed Mock Interviews

CALM

- Class Rules
- Anger Meter
- Identifying Cues to Anger in the Workplace
- Resolving Conflict Peacefully
- Problem Solving on a Team
- Keeping Track of time
- Time Blocking
- Scheduling
- Time Enhancing Habits
- Self-Care
- Workplace Communication
- Saying No
- Listening Versus Hearing
- Descriptive Communication
- Productive Communication Environments
- Clarifying Questions
- What Employers are Looking For
- Job Scams
- Positivity at Work (ALIS workbook)
- Values of Attitudes
- Preparing for Interviews and Workforce Re-entry

Intermediate Computers

- Fundamentals of the internet / History
- Google Drive
- Uploading Files
- Google Slides
- Google Search
- Creating a Budget
- Cost Comparisons
- Resumes
- Job Search
- LinkedIn
- Internet Safety
- Phone plans
- Computer Terminology

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the creation and success of PEP.

- The Participants
- Employment Specialists and Facilitators, Giselle and Janice
- Berniece and Staff from Bow Valley College
- Cristina and staff from the Calgary John Howard Society
- Bill Campbell
- Ramiro and Staff from Workday
- Terri from Calgary Learns
- Staff at the Alex
- The organizations that welcomed us for our Volunteer Work Experience: ComuniTree Kitchen, Sonshine, TELUS Spark, DI Warehouse, Fort Calgary, and Clothes up and Personal.
- The organizations and individuals who participated in the Mock Interviews: Shaw, Synergie Hunt International, People Ready, Mr. Campbell, Good Food Box, Mr. Youens, Green Events Services
- Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness
- And all of the silent partners along the way

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

