
Enhanced Single Parent Project

Impact Evaluation

For the

**Kawartha Pine Ridge
District School Board**

Charterfield
CONSULTING

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Executive Summary

Program Overview

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was designed to support female single parents who were 18+ and working towards completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma at the Peterborough Alternative and Continuing Education high school (PACE). It provided small, inclusive group learning with an emphasis on the development of wellness strategies, life/parenting skills, and career-pathway skills and planning through a culinary program as well as involvement of various community services/supports. The program was offered in two delivery blocks from March-June and September-December 2018, five days per week for ten weeks.

The goals of the initiative were to increase participants' food security, self-sufficiency and resilience through culinary training, completing high school, designing and implementing a career pathway plan (post-secondary education, training, employment), and establishing a more positive home environment and personal well-being. The program also aimed to connect participants to a community of support within the program, the school, and the larger community. These changes in the lives of the participants were also intended to benefit their children, providing an intergenerational impact through addressing the ongoing food insecurity faced by these families and helping to break the cycle of poverty.

Program content addressed food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience from a number of angles. Immediate food security content centred around increasing culinary skills, financial literacy related to food and family, access to school food security supports such as hot lunches, and awareness of local resources such as the food box, community gardens, gleaning, and the farmer's market. Longer-term food security and self-sufficiency content was focused on culinary training and certifications that aided in credit acquisition and employability, high school graduation, post-secondary pathway planning, resume preparation, and connections to a local employment agency. Personal and family wellness content included culinary skills and nutrition, positive parenting, mindfulness and yoga, mental health, family court support, and healthy relationships. In the second delivery block, workshops on housing, smoking cessation, and the Healthy Smiles Ontario program were also included as a result of feedback from the first delivery block. All of this program content was intended to assist participants in increasing resilience and establishing a more positive home environment for themselves and their children.

Evaluation Overview

This impact evaluation was conducted to assess the project's effectiveness in assisting both cohorts of participants to increase food security, self-sufficiency and resilience, using Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators (high school graduation; youth not in education, employment, or training) as well as project-specific outcome indicators (see Appendix A for the program's logic model and Appendix B for a list of outcome indicators). A process evaluation was conducted of the first delivery block, examining

whether the project had been implemented as planned as well as the effectiveness of the program. The results of the process evaluation are contained in a previous report prepared in August 2018. This report contains the results of the impact evaluation of both blocks, including a follow-up with the first block participants seven months after they finished the program.

The evaluation's design was quasi-experimental, collecting data at intervals for each cohort and using multiple data sources to allow triangulation. Due to the small number of program participants, all participants were included in the evaluation. Program participants provided information to the evaluation through intake forms, focus groups, questionnaires, and individual interviews; program staff, other school staff, and partner agencies were also interviewed. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data was conducted, and recommendations have been proposed based on the findings.

Limited data was collected from participants at the beginning of the first delivery block, since the evaluator was not yet involved. Data regarding pre-program knowledge and experience for the first cohort was collected in the exit questionnaire and is based on participant estimation of pre-program knowledge and experience. Baseline data was collected at the beginning of the second delivery block to determine pre-program knowledge and experience for the second cohort.

Key Findings

Program Implementation

The Enhanced Single Parent Program was largely implemented as planned and included all of the elements in its design. Minor variances were caused by the tight ten-week schedule in which a few of the planned activities were unable to be accommodated. The program succeeded in attracting its target audience, although the number of participants was less than half of the original target. Interviews with program participants, staff, and program partners indicate, however, that the smaller number of participants worked well in creating the conditions for the connections with staff, with each other, and with community agencies that were key to the program's success. Fifteen out of 18 participants (83%) completed the program (the program target was 90%).

Individual attendance of those who completed the program in the first block ranged from 68% to 96%, with an average of 81% and a median of 80% (program target: 80%). Participants and school staff identified appointments, sick children, and changes in their lives outside of school as challenges in attendance. Other challenges noted by school staff and program partners were punctuality and cell phone use during program time. In the second block, participants experienced major challenges in attendance, with individual attendance ranging from 32% to 77%, with an average of 50% and a median of 49%. Participants indicated that they were motivated to attend, but were prevented from doing so because of childcare, medical issues, and transportation problems. School staff and partner agencies agreed that participants were fully engaged when they were able to attend.

Interviewees identified three key aspects of the program that contributed to the achievement of outcomes: creating connections, skill-building, and wellness. The connections that were established with program staff, other participants, the school community, and the larger community were the foundation of the program and were identified as a major contributing factor to the program's success. The participants gained skills in many areas that were relevant to their lives, both in managing current situations and in moving toward their goals. As well, many program elements were designed to prevent or reduce stress in the participants' lives and promote wellness.

Immediate Food Security

All of the participants indicated that they were using the culinary skills that they learned at home, and several noted that they didn't cook at home previously and were now confident in preparing food for their family. Other immediate food security supports included the participants taking home food that they prepared in the culinary sessions, as well as connecting participants with food support provided to the school community through hot lunches on Fridays and through the student retention counsellor, who brought food and other essentials from Kawartha Food Share to school. It also connected participants with community resources for immediate assistance with food security, such as the Food Box, gleaning, community gardens, and community kitchens. Finally, the program addressed financial literacy in family management, looking at ways to make the most effective use of their income and to avoid financial pitfalls that would affect their ability to have access to nutritious food; all participants completed a family budget during the program. Longer-term food security was covered by the outcomes related to self-sufficiency, discussed below.

Self-Sufficiency

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing self-sufficiency through education, training, employment, and connections with relevant community agencies. Participants and school staff concurred that the program was effective in increasing student engagement, with participants noting that the hands-on training was well suited to their learning style and the small group format allowed them to share experiences. The skills and experience acquired through the training sessions and workshops contributed to credit acquisition; all participants who completed the program in the first delivery block earned three credits, with one participant earning four credits (target: 80% earning 3 credits). As well, three participants earned an additional credit in parallel to the program, and one participant earned two additional credits. In the second cohort, four participants earned three credits, one earned five, and one earned a credit. Although the students were able to compensate for some of their absences through completion of assignments, some did not receive all of the credits that they were working toward in the program.

In the first cohort, all but one of the participants who completed the program were within five credits of completing their secondary school diploma. Of the eight participants who were close to graduating, seven finished their remaining requirements through the program or in parallel to it and graduated in June 2018. The target for the program is an 80% graduation rate within one year of program completion; the participants in the first

delivery block attained a 78% graduation rate at program completion. Participants and school staff attributed the high graduation rate to the momentum created through the program. Two of the participants who graduated applied to college and were accepted. In the second cohort, all of the participants still had credits to complete after the program, which they enrolled in immediately after the program finished. Four participants were on track to graduate by the end of the school year, with the two remaining participants projected to graduate the following year.

Participants had the opportunity to earn a number of employment-related certifications through the program: Smart Serve, Food Handler's, First Aid, and Customer Service and Point of Sale training. Three participants already had their Food Handler's certification and ten completed theirs in the program. Four participants already had Smart Serve certification, and nine more received it through the program. Twelve received First Aid certification, and six received the Customer Service/Point of Sale training (which was not offered in the second block due to scheduling issues). Participants noted that the certifications were a motivation for joining the program and would be useful in certain post-secondary programs as well as in employment.

Finally, seven out of nine participants (78%) were connected or planning to connect with Employment Planning and Counselling (a community employment agency) to assist them in their job search (target: 70% within six months of program completion), most through the Youth Job Connection program that offers paid training as well as work placements. The follow-up with participants after seven months found that, of the seven who participated in interviews, three were engaged in employment and three in education (target: 80% engaged in EET within six months of completing their OSSD).

Participants in both cohorts indicated that their participation in the program created momentum and a belief that they could achieve their goal of graduating. For most of the first cohort, who completed the program at the end of the school year, this momentum carried on into the search for summer or longer-term employment and the pursuit of post-secondary education.

Resilience

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing resilience through addressing aspects of individual development, family and household, social context, and health (a detailed discussion of the definition of resilience and the factors predictive of resilience is included in Section 7.4 of this report). Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that the participants' confidence and self-advocacy levels increased during the program. All of the participants noted that they were implementing the techniques they learned in the parenting course; participants stated that their level of stress around parenting had decreased and the effectiveness of their parenting interactions had increased. All of the participants developed a household budget and indicated that they were implementing the financial practices that were presented in the workshops or that they were already adept at financial management. The participants indicated that the discussions on healthy relationships were very helpful and some noted that they made changes in their relationships with partners as a result of these

discussions. Another aspect of support for family and household issues was with navigating the family court system; participants indicated that they learned a great deal from these discussions. In the second delivery block, the participants received a workshop on affordable housing options as well.

Participants, school staff, and program partners concurred that one of the strengths of the program was in increasing the community of support available to the participants. This community of support involved the program coordinators, other participants, school staff, and community agencies. The coordinators played the central role in establishing a welcoming, supportive atmosphere in the program; all participants indicated a sense of connection to the coordinators and underlined how supportive they were in various situations. A stronger expression of connection to the coordinators was associated with higher requirements for assistance. Most of the participants built a network of support with each other, with many indicating they had not anticipated how close they would become with other participants. They noted that this supportive environment allowed them to open up and share their experiences and to learn that others felt the same way or had gone through similar experiences. Participants also became connected to community agencies through the workshop facilitators in the program. The participants stated that they now know more about the community agencies and what programs are available, and that they feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. One participant noted, “Before it was hard to seek the proper help. I didn’t know who to turn to. Now I feel 1000% more confident and I know where to go.” In the follow-up with the first cohort, most participants stated that they were still connected with the other participants, and all noted that they were now connected with others through work, education, or community groups. Four indicated accessing personal/family life-related community resources that they had connected with through the program.

The major health-related interventions of the program included food security, nutrition, mental health supports, and mindfulness and yoga sessions; in the second delivery block, workshops on the Healthy Smiles ON program and smoking cessation were also included. All participants stated that they were implementing the wellness strategies that they had learned in the program; participants indicated that the mindfulness techniques and breathing were very effective in reducing anxiety and stress. The follow-up interviews indicated that participants continued to implement these strategies seven months after they completed the program. All participants in both cohorts, including those who had lower attendance rates, indicated that the techniques and strategies that they learned, as well as the support of the coordinators, other participants, and partner agency facilitators, gave them more resources to cope with challenges and more confidence in their ability to do so. All participants also noted aspects of their home environment that were more positive because of their participation in the program, which was a long-term outcome for the personal/family life component of the program.

To obtain further evidence of changes in level of resilience, the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10) was administered to the participants at the end of the first delivery block (due to delays in engaging the evaluator, baseline values were not obtained for this group), as well as at the beginning and end of the second delivery

block. The total score for the CD-RISC-10 ranges from 0-40; a mean score of 25.6 was obtained with the participants at the end of the first delivery block, with a median of 26. Individual scores ranged from 18-33. Most of the individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data gathered from interviews with participants and the coordinator. For the second cohort, the pre-program mean score was 25.2, with a median of 24. Individual scores ranged from 18-34. Post-program, the mean score was 32.3 and the median was 31.5, with individual scores from 26-40. Scores increased by 5-13 over the course of the program, and they increased for all participants. Individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data. The second cohort pre-program mean score was only slightly lower than the post-program mean score for the first cohort, which was consistent with lower pre- and post-program ratings of confidence and self-advocacy for the first cohort compared to the second cohort.

Overall Program Impact

Participants, school staff, and program partners offered many comments on the overall impact of the program. A selection of these comments is included here.

- When I was doing PLAR [an individualized program at PACE], I was on my own. This is all together, with just single parents. Before, I felt like a loser, I felt alone. I think this program is really important, really cool.
- I'm more engaged in things, more willing to do things and ask for help. It opened my eyes to a lot more opportunities in the community, now that there is a familiar face at the organizations. At home, I'm cooking now and that's made a big difference. I got more information about things to get through the day, things I needed to know.
- We built up confidence in the group. [The coordinator] and the other teachers were giving us confidence, for example to go hand out resumes. [The coordinator] really helped with coping with everything, and yoga was really helpful for calming down. It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food. Everything has completely changed with the course.
- Their self-confidence increased. A number of them applied to college. They wouldn't have had the confidence to apply without this program. They looked healthier, they were eating better, and they were more self-assured, with their heads higher. They were proud of their accomplishments.
- At the beginning, they said, "I'm never going to graduate this year." By the end, one was accepted to college. I was worried that nine participants [in the first block] were not enough to make a big impact, but when you see the change in their lives, the individual impacts, it made me say, "How can we make this broadly available?" They are not only finishing high school but taking their next steps.
- I think the value of this program is in helping them with every aspect of their lives – budgeting, food, other specific things, but also mindfulness and lifestyle. No matter what is arising for them – parenting, relationship issues – this helps them to manage what is arising in their life. The program gives them microtools that they can put into practice easily, and it's customized to their issues – health, self-esteem, guilt, anxiety, parenting. The value is in giving them enough tools to surpass the barriers that they face.

- My advice to the program is to keep doing what you are doing. If you change one life a semester, that's incredible. It impacts not just them, but also their children.

Program Modifications

Suggestions for potential program modifications were offered by participants, program staff, and program partners regarding recruiting, scheduling, number of participants, eligibility, and program content.

Recommendations

It is recommended that program management:

1. Select a name for the program that reflects its target audience
2. Develop a promotion and recruitment strategy
3. Examine the options for broadening the target audience for the program, decide on eligibility for future delivery blocks, clarify the promotional materials if necessary, and communicate the decision to program partners
4. Review the suggestions for program content modifications and determine the suitability for inclusion of the suggestions in the future, while retaining the focus on the core program
5. Continue to collect data on outcomes as well as feedback from participants, staff, and program partners on potential program modifications

Conclusion

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was largely implemented as designed, with a few variances due mainly to scheduling difficulties. The program succeeded in attracting its target audience, although the number of participants was less than half of the original target. Interviews with program participants, staff, and program partners indicated, however, that the small number of participants worked well in creating the conditions for the connections with staff, with each other, and with community agencies that were key to the program's success. By offering a supportive coordinator and experiential learning for a small group of participants with common issues and experiences, the program created an environment that increased participants' motivation to attend and engaged them in their learning. Participants indicated that the combination of feeling supported and having new ways of managing their lives in key areas (food security, finances, wellness, parenting, relationships, etc.) provided the impetus for them to move forward with their goals. Participants, school staff, and program partners provided strong qualitative evidence in support of program effectiveness for both cohorts of program participants in increasing food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience, and in developing a more positive home environment. Progress was noted on the Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators of high school graduation and youth aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training, with evidence that the program supported participants in graduating and in becoming engaged in post-secondary education and employment.

Enhanced Single Parent Project

Impact Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was designed to support female single parents who were 18 years old or over and working towards completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma at the Peterborough Alternative and Continuing Education high school (PACE). The program was offered in two delivery blocks from March-June and September-December 2018. Each delivery block involved three weeks of preparation, ten weeks of program delivery, and two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. It provided small, inclusive group learning with an emphasis on the development of wellness strategies, life and parenting skills, and career-pathway skills and planning through a culinary program as well as involvement of various community services and supports. The initiative was designed to improve food security in the short term by increasing culinary skills and financial literacy related to food and family, and in the longer term by providing culinary training and certifications that aided in credit acquisition and employability, as well as by assisting participants to graduate from high school and follow their post-secondary path.

This impact evaluation was conducted to assess the project's effectiveness in assisting the first and second cohorts of participants to increase food security, self-sufficiency and resilience, using Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators as well as project-specific outcome indicators. Program modifications are proposed and recommendations made based on the findings.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation's design was quasi-experimental. Participants self-selected into the program, with two cohorts over the course of the program; the evaluation collected data at intervals for both cohorts. Multiple data sources were used to allow triangulation. Due to the small number of program participants, all participants were included in the evaluation.

The project was delivered in two blocks, one from March-June 2018 and the other from September-December 2018. A process evaluation was conducted of the first delivery block, examining whether the project had been implemented as planned as well as the effectiveness of the program. The results of the process evaluation are contained in a previous report prepared in August 2018. This report contains the results of the impact evaluation of both blocks. The impact evaluation examined the effectiveness of the program in assisting the first and second cohorts of participants in increasing food security, self-sufficiency and resilience and in establishing a more positive home

environment. Participants from the first cohort were included in the impact evaluation to determine the medium-term impacts of the program.

Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators (high school graduation; youth aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training) as well as project-specific outcome indicators were used in determining program effectiveness (see Appendix A for the program's logic model and Appendix B for a list of outcome indicators). Recommendations have been made based on the findings, as well as recommendations for the program regarding ongoing data collection to continue to track performance on indicators for current and future cohorts.

2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected between April and July 2018 for the first delivery block, and from September 2018 to February 2019 for the second delivery block. Delays in engaging the third-party evaluator resulted in limited baseline data collected for the first cohort, who completed an intake form administered by the program coordinator. Informed consent to participate in the evaluation was obtained from all participants in both cohorts. Baseline data was collected for the second cohort at the beginning of the second delivery block through an entrance questionnaire. Both cohorts completed an exit questionnaire and individual interviews; a focus group was also held in each delivery block to gather feedback on the program. Key informant interviews regarding program implementation and effectiveness were conducted with the program coordinators, the vice-principal, and other school staff, as well as the individuals from community agencies who delivered the program content. The program coordinators were also interviewed regarding the results obtained by individual participants. Participants from the first cohort were interviewed or participated in an online survey at the end of the second delivery block to determine medium and long-term impacts of the program. The evaluation attempted to contact all participants from the first cohort; seven out of nine completed an interview or online survey.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data was conducted. Quantitative analysis was limited to descriptive statistics; the small number of participants precludes the extrapolation of the results to a larger population. While descriptive statistics have been included to provide an indication of achievement of outcomes, it should be noted that, due to the small number of participants in each cohort, the possible values are limited. Qualitative analysis identified feedback on program implementation and themes emerging from the data regarding program effectiveness as well as program modifications suggested by key informants.

2.2 Reporting

This report was prepared to summarize the impact evaluation findings for the first and second delivery blocks as well as suggested program modifications and recommendations. The results of the process evaluation are contained in a previous report prepared in August 2018.

2.3 Limitations

Limited data was collected from participants at the beginning of the first delivery block, since the evaluator was not yet involved. Data regarding pre-program knowledge and experience for the first cohort was collected in the exit questionnaire and is based on participant estimation of pre-program knowledge and experience. Baseline data was collected at the beginning of the second delivery block to determine pre-program knowledge and experience for the second cohort.

No comparison group was established and therefore there is a risk that the results obtained with these participants may not be replicated with other groups. This risk is mitigated by comparing results obtained with both cohorts of the program and by collecting data from multiple sources (participants, program coordinator, other school staff, and program partners) and instruments (questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus groups, and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale) to allow triangulation of data to support the validity of the findings.

3 PROGRAM DESIGN

3.1 Goals

The goals of the initiative were to increase participants' food security, self-sufficiency and resilience through culinary training, completing high school, designing and implementing a career pathway plan (post-secondary education, training, employment), and establishing a more positive home environment and personal well-being. The program also aimed to connect participants to a community of support within the program, the school, and the larger community. These changes in the lives of the participants were also intended to benefit their children, providing an intergenerational impact through addressing the ongoing food insecurity faced by these families and helping to break the cycle of poverty.

3.2 Background

The Enhanced Single Parent Project built on a program offered in the previous two years at PACE as well as two other alternative education sites of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB), the Clarington Centre for Individual Studies (CCIS) and the Northumberland Centre for Individual Studies (NCIS). That program was funded through Single Parent Initiative grants from the Adult and Continuing Education branch of the Ministry of Education and ran from February-April both years. In 2016, sixteen 75-minute sessions (one period) were offered at PACE and six 75-minute sessions were offered at CCIS and NCIS. The program included wellness strategies, life and parenting skills, career pathway planning, and community supports and services; the PACE location also offered a culinary component. In 2017, the program was initially offered at all three sites, but the CCIS and NCIS sites were consolidated at CCIS partway through

program delivery due to limited enrolment. In response to student feedback from the first year, the PACE location expanded to three periods per day for sixteen days in Year 2 and was therefore able to offer partial completion of two credits through the program, as well as opportunities for credit recovery.¹ There were different program coordinators and chefs in each year. The 2017 program coordinator developed the proposal for the enhanced program that was submitted to the Local Poverty Reduction Fund. Funding was received from LPRF for two delivery blocks and program evaluation.

3.3 Design

The program was designed to engage participants in skill-building through experiential learning and workshops on a variety of topics, with an emphasis on food security and wellness. Another key factor in the approach was the coordinator's ability to encourage students in their connection with school, assist them in resolving issues as they arose, and facilitate the establishment of a community of support among the students. PACE's vice-principal attended a sharing session of similar programs funded by the Ministry of Education grant before the program began at KPRDSB, and indicated, "In that session, some of the participants from other programs talked about their experiences. I realized there were two very important components: the connection that the participants made with the coordinator, and the bond that formed between the participants, giving them friendship and community."

Building on the experience gained through the previous two years of program delivery, the decision was made to focus the Enhanced Single Parent Program at PACE rather than delivering it at multiple sites simultaneously, to have the program run five days per week at PACE, and to extend program delivery to 10 weeks to improve the support offered to students by increasing the amount of time spent in the program. The increased program time allowed participants to complete three credits in the first cohort and up to five credits in the second cohort and to have opportunities for credit recovery as well as for earning additional credits in parallel to the program. The PACE location was selected since it had the largest group of potential participants and a teaching kitchen for the culinary sessions. As well, the urban location helped to alleviate transportation issues and the on-site childcare was being used by some participants, simplifying their participation in the program.

At the end of the first delivery block, the vice-principal indicated,

This year the program worked a lot better, with the new format. In previous years, the students loved the culinary part, but some did not attend the other day for the in-class time. This year we had better engagement. It was also the group of girls [in the first cohort]. They really felt kinship with each other and formed strong bonds quickly. They spent every day together and that made a big difference.

¹ Credit recovery: students who have failed a course work with a teacher to retake the units in which they did not meet expectations, rather than retaking the entire course

3.4 Eligibility

Eligibility for the program was advertised as:

- Single parent [in the second block, the criteria specified female single parent]
- 18+ years of age
- Looking to complete the OSSD or upgrade²
- Wanting community supports and resources
- Requiring training and certifications for employment

In practice, staff interpreted ‘single parent’ broadly, with the poster and website indicating, “Ask us if you wonder if this could be you.” The program coordinator for the first delivery block noted, “As long as they reported themselves as ‘single’ on their tax form, then we accepted them. Their partnerships can change quickly.” This practice was retained for the second delivery block.

4 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The following section describes various aspects of program implementation, including staffing, preparation, program content, recruitment, program delivery, and reporting/planning.

4.1 Staffing

Staffing consisted of a program coordinator, with administrative support from the vice-principal and office staff as well as input from other staff such as the guidance counsellor and the PLAR³ teacher. In order to offer credits, the program coordinator must be a teacher and therefore the hiring process must follow KPRDSB human resource policies. Each program block ran for 15 weeks, including three weeks of preparation, ten weeks of program delivery, and two weeks of reporting and planning, and was staffed by a long-term occasional teacher. The first block was originally intended to run from February to May 2018, but became delayed due to staffing issues; it ran from mid-March until the end of June. The second block ran as scheduled from the first week of September until mid-December. The sessions were offered five days a week for ten weeks. In addition to the three periods per day of program delivery (10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.), the coordinator was available each day before and after the program to assist participants with completing additional credits and to provide coaching/mentoring assistance in other areas.

A new coordinator was hired for each program delivery block, since the position was short-term due to HR requirements and the coordinator from the first delivery block moved to a longer-term position elsewhere. The program required a teacher who was skilled at adapting the program to the individual participants’ credit requirements, and

² OSSD: Ontario Secondary School Diploma; upgrading refers to retaking a course to improve the grade earned

³ The Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) program grants credits through assessments and through learning completed outside of school to students who are over 18 and who have been off a school register for at least 10 months.

was capable of creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere that engaged participants, provided a safe space, and allowed for the development of a supportive community of participants. The coordinators also supported participants through the daily challenges of their lives, responding to issues in areas such as housing, relationships, and finances. The vice-principal indicated that in the future, the position should be posted as early as possible so that there would be a good pool of candidates, and that if it were possible to hire for longer periods of time, it would allow for more preparation time and flexibility in delivery.

The turnover in staff meant that each coordinator spent time at the outset becoming familiar with the program, the partner agencies, and the various supports available in the community. Past coordinators were very supportive in helping the new coordinator to navigate this process. Continuity in staffing would lighten the load on the coordinator, especially in the initial weeks. The vice-principal noted that the position would ideally become part of the regular staffing at the school, providing more opportunity for continuity as well as certainty in program scheduling, which would facilitate recruitment and partner agency participation.

Another key role in program delivery, although not a KPRDSB staff member, was the chef who provided the culinary training, since this training represented 40% of program activities. The chef was involved in both delivery blocks.

4.2 Program Preparation

In the first delivery block, the coordinator indicated that three weeks for program preparation was challenging, since she had not been involved previously and the schedule had not been developed. In the three weeks before program delivery began, the coordinator determined the elements of the enhanced program based on the program proposal and on the schedule from previous years, contacted the partner agencies to investigate their program offering and availability, and set up the schedule. She recruited a chef and acquired program materials. Because of the tight timeline, the first week of program delivery had fewer activities, which she noted was helpful to allow for extra preparation time.

The coordinator and guidance counsellor determined which credits each participant would gain through the program. As the guidance counsellor noted,

Rather than having to take certain credits, we were able to use the program content and see what credits would make sense for each of them. It was very flexible. We saw which credits they needed and what could be done through the program while still covering the expectations for the courses. It certainly worked out best to look individually at what they needed, what they could get with the program, and what else they would need to graduate, such as English.

In this way, the program was able to provide maximum benefit for each participant in completing requirements for graduation, rather than only offering a pre-determined set of credits.

In the second delivery block, the new coordinator used the first block coordinator's report and schedule as well as her contact list at the agencies, which simplified the scheduling. Minor adjustments were made to the schedule in the second block, following the recommendations from the previous coordinator and process evaluation comments from participants. Friday afternoons were generally left open so that the students could attend the hot lunch program and the PACE boutique (for second-hand clothing and other items), and then work on their assignments, although a few shorter sessions were scheduled later on Friday afternoons, after the boutique time. It was also a time when they could schedule appointments to avoid missing sessions. As well, some workshops were placed strategically, depending on their content, such as including the Food Handler certification near the beginning. A challenge that arose in scheduling for the second delivery block was the number of days available for programming, since there were three Professional Activity days as well as the Thanksgiving holiday, resulting in four fewer 'program' days available in the 10-week delivery period.

The second block coordinator reviewed the content of the workshops to determine what would be covered for each credit, identified any gaps, and created supplementary assignments for those requirements. Since she had taken the Guidance Part 1 course, she was able to use the participants' credit counselling summaries to determine which credits each one would be working toward and then review this assessment with the guidance counsellor, lightening the load on the guidance department. She then created a binder for each student with sections for each workshop, an overview of each credit that they would be working toward, and any assignments that would be required to complete the credit. She noted,

I was a bit concerned that giving them this at the beginning would be overwhelming for some, but I did want them to know what the plan was, and what they needed to do by Week 10 to get these credits. I didn't want them to feel that they didn't know what the requirements were and that they would never be able to get credits if they were missing days. ... Some of them came in at 9:00 or stayed after 2:00 to work on the assignments.

This approach assisted the participants in completing the requirements for credits, even though attendance was a major challenge for many participants in the second delivery block.

4.3 Program Content

Program content in both delivery blocks addressed food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience from a number of angles. Immediate food security content centred around increasing culinary skills, financial literacy related to food and family, access to school food security supports such as hot lunches, and awareness of local resources such as the food box, community gardens, gleaning, and the farmer's market. Longer-term food security and self-sufficiency content was focused on culinary training and certifications that aided in credit acquisition and employability, high school graduation, post-secondary pathway planning, resume preparation, and connections to a local employment agency. Personal and family wellness content included culinary skills and nutrition, positive parenting, mindfulness and yoga, mental health, family court support, and healthy

relationships. In the second delivery block, the coordinator added workshops on housing, smoking cessation, and the Healthy Smiles Ontario program. All of this program content was intended to assist participants in achieving a more positive home environment.

Program content was delivered through Chef Günther Schubert, Rooted Lavender (mindfulness/yoga practitioner), and a number of community agencies: Peterborough Public Health (PPH), Employment Planning and Counselling (EPC), Community Counselling and Resource Centre (CCRC), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), the YWCA Peterborough Haliburton, Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre (KSAC), and Nourish Peterborough. A speaker from Investors Group (IG) also delivered a financial literacy session. In the first delivery block, the Adult Training Network (ATN) at PACE provided a training session, and in the second delivery block, Housing Access Peterborough (HAP) facilitated a session.

Program elements in the first delivery block included:

- **Culinary training** (Chef Günther, 19 full-day sessions) All aspects of food preparation, with a focus on cooking at home and healthy eating
- **Tour of George Brown College's culinary program facilities and the St. Lawrence Market**, Toronto (Chef Günther, full day trip)
- **Healthy Eating for Healthy Families** (PPH, 1 full-day session) Nutrition and food preparation, food guidelines for young children, Canada's Food Guide
- **Come Cook with Us** (Nourish, 1 half-day session) Food Box and meal preparation, gleaning, community gardens
- **Farmer's Market tour** (downtown Peterborough)
- **Food Handler Training and Certification** (PPH, 1-day course)
- **Smart Serve** (EPC, 1-day course)
- **First Aid** (Canadian Red Cross, 2-day course)
- **Customer Service and Point of Sale training** (ATN, 1-day course)
- **Resume Building** (EPC, 1 half-day session) Effective resumes, individual resume preparation
- **Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting course** (PPH, 7 half-day sessions) Child development and effective parenting principles; practical guidelines for communication, respect, skill-building
- **Mindfulness** (Rooted Lavender, 5 half-day sessions)
- **Yoga** (Rooted Lavender, 5 half-day sessions)
- **Financial literacy** (CCRC 3 half-day sessions; IG 1 half-day session) Self-advocacy, budgeting, banking, credit, car insurance, payday loans, rent to own.
- **Mental health** (CMHA, 3 half-day sessions) CMHA programs and services, Mental Health 101, Stress Management
- **Family Court support** (YWCA, 1 half-day session) YWCA services, family court support, Q&A on family court issues
- **Healthy Relationships** (KSAC, 1 half-day session) KSAC services, healthy and abusive relationships

In the second delivery block, most of the sessions remained the same, with the following exceptions:

- **Housing** (HAP, 1 half-day session) Housing supports and subsidized housing
- **Healthy Smiles Ontario** (PPH, 1 half-day session) Free dental services for ages 0-18
- **Smoking Cessation** (PPH, 1 half-day session) Techniques and nicotine replacement therapies
- Due to availability of participants, the field trip to Toronto was cancelled; instead, the group toured a supermarket in Peterborough and prepared a meal together.
- PPH did a half-day session on toddler nutrition, without a cooking session; the participants received a cookbook and had a discussion of the importance of cooking at home.
- Due to scheduling issues, the participants did not receive the ATN training on Customer Service and Point of Sale.
- The *Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting* was delivered in 5 sessions, due to the smaller number of participants.
- CCRC delivered 4 half-day financial literacy sessions.
- KSAC delivered two sessions on their services and healthy relationships.

4.4 Recruitment

Recruitment was another major focus for both coordinators in the lead-up to program delivery. School staff such as teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal identified potential participants, and community agencies referred one participant in each delivery block. Participants who had expressed an interest in the past or had not completed the program were also contacted. In all, the coordinator in the first block contacted more than 20 potential participants, and the second block coordinator contacted 29 potential participants.

In the first block, posters were prepared to advertise the program and were effective in recruiting some participants within the school. Posters were also displayed at community agencies. Peterborough Public Health shared the information internally with staff in programs with potential participants, posted information on its website, and shared it on social media, which was effective at notifying staff at other local agencies and the City of Peterborough, who then contacted the coordinator for more information. Similarly, in the second delivery block, PPH spread the word to staff in its related programs, and other community agencies posted on social media and displayed posters at their locations. The vice-principal noted that in the first delivery block, community partners were ready to start recruiting earlier, but the delay in staffing caused uncertainty in the program start date. In the second delivery block, delays in funder approval of the posters and website led to recruitment outside of PACE beginning later than anticipated. The program had expected more referrals from community partners.

School staff had planned a celebration and official launch for the SPP program at the end of the first block, when the participants hosted a meal that they prepared for their families, school staff, and the partner agencies who had participated in the program. The

plan had been to make this celebration a media event in order to publicize the program and assist with awareness and future recruitment. Partner agencies supported the publicizing of the program and indicated that it would assist with recruitment. Due to funder restrictions, no launch or media event was carried out, either at the end of the first block or subsequently, affecting awareness in the community and impacting recruitment for the program.

Each of the coordinators established a website for their delivery block. Although the coordinator's telephone contact information was included on the poster and website, only a few students followed up by telephone, with most coming to the classroom or being contacted by the coordinator. Participants in the second delivery block indicated that the website for the first delivery block "kept popping up" when they were searching for more information online related to the second delivery block, so the program may wish to consider archiving older versions of the website before each delivery block.

One of the most effective recruitment tools in the first delivery block was word of mouth. Students who started on the first day of the program talked to other students and encouraged them to join the program. As the coordinator noted, "On Day 1 we had three students, Day 2 we had seven, and three started a week later." This success in participants recruiting others helped to mitigate the short recruitment timeframe. In the second delivery block, the coordinator asked the people she contacted on the list of potential participants to let their friends know about the program, and one participant was recruited through that process. The coordinator noted, "The most effective recruitment was when I could talk to them on the phone or in person, and then they said yes and signed up." She indicated, "The big 'sells' in recruiting were the certifications, cooking, positive discipline, mindfulness, learning new things, community agencies, especially for those who were not comfortable accessing things and I could say, 'You'll know who it is.'"

Most of the participants in the first block joined after the program started. The coordinator noted, "I loved the format, not having to tell people they have to wait until next semester because they missed the beginning." She reflected that the program may need to consider, "What is the tipping point? How far into the program can we add people?" Also, as noted above, the first week of the program had fewer activities. The coordinator indicated, "It gave the opportunity for some to finish off what they were doing [in other classes]. I told them, 'We'll work it out. Just come.'" It may thus be important to provide a brief transition time for some of the participants who are completing other course work or adjusting availability in work schedules, especially if the recruitment timeline is short. In the second delivery block, all but one of the participants began on the first day. The coordinator received a call from an interested individual more than halfway through the program, which was too late to join.

Several recruitment barriers for participants were identified:

- **Childcare:** Subsidies were available to participants and there was a childcare provider in the school building; however, participants were required to make their

own childcare arrangements. Both coordinators noted that many potential participants were unable to find childcare spaces, impacting enrolment.

- **Employment:** One potential participant in the first delivery block was working half days and decided not to participate in the program; in the second delivery block, there were several potential participants who decided to focus on employment instead.
- **Other Programs:** A potential participant in the first block had nearly completed a final credit needed for graduation and was concerned that it would not be possible to combine the program with the time required to finish the credit before the end of the school year. In the second block, the coordinator noted, “PLAR was a big help, although the students there were a bit more resistant to leaving PLAR to do the program.”
- **Transportation:** One potential participant in the first delivery block lived outside the area serviced by public transit.

As well, in the second block there were two potential participants “who wanted to join but were pregnant and due in November, so it wasn’t going to work out.”

4.5 Program Delivery

Both coordinators reported that the majority of the schedule was determined before program delivery began and so coordination with the program partners was minimal after that point. They indicated that 80-90% of their time during the ten weeks of program delivery was devoted to attending the workshops with the participants and providing participants with coaching, mentoring and advocacy support related to issues arising in their lives. The first block coordinator noted that this aspect of the program was “intense and exhausting” due to the need for constant support and the range and urgency of the issues (partner and former partner relationships, food insecurity, transportation, housing, income support, employment, parenting, health, family court, childcare, family relationships). Although time-consuming, this aspect of program delivery was instrumental in building the bonds of trust between the coordinator and the participants and in supporting them in their continued participation.

The coordinators attended the sessions delivered by program partners and ensured that topics required in the curriculum were covered in the workshops (for example, simple and compound interest). The second block coordinator noted, “At the beginning, I was helping them to engage in the workshops, but it got better as it went. They were speaking up and asking questions.” The coordinators also assisted participants with credits that they were completing in parallel to the program; they were available for an hour before and after the program each day to work with students individually on assignments. This time was also beneficial for assisting participants with personal issues.

Scheduling issues caused some changes to the planned program in both delivery blocks, due both to the tight timeline for program development before delivery began and to the limited availability of time slots in the ten-week delivery period because of the number of activities scheduled. The following sessions did not occur due to scheduling issues:

- Aspire, a mentoring program that matches youth aged 17-25 with an adult in the community to achieve training and employment success

- Vision boards and planning for the future session from Community Counselling and Resource Centre
- Follow-up financial literacy session by the Investors Group representative (first block)
- Preparation of a meal for the One Roof Community Diner, as an opportunity for participants to give back to the community (second block)

The planned trip to George Brown College and the St. Lawrence Market in Toronto was cancelled in the second block because “not enough were able to go, and because the ones who were pregnant weren’t able to walk much. We looked into renting wheelchairs, but it became too difficult to be taking them” on an extended trip due to high-risk pregnancies, so the chef gave a tour of a local supermarket instead. One day of the program in each delivery block was cancelled due to inclement weather.

4.6 Reporting/Planning

The final phase of the program consisted of two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. The coordinators were interviewed for the program evaluation as well as providing individual assessments of each program participant’s progress on outcomes. They also produced a recipe book for the participants, including all of the recipes that they had prepared over the course of the program.

5 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The grant proposal indicated that the target number of participants⁴ per delivery block was 20. The program recruited eleven participants in the first delivery block, two of whom did not complete the program. Based on the experience gained in the first delivery block, the coordinator, the chef, and the participants felt that this group size was ideal. Other school staff concurred, noting, “Although we said this time, ‘We only have 10,’ it is kind of the magic number.” In the second delivery block, the program recruited seven participants, one of whom did not complete the program. The coordinator, other school staff, and partner agencies commented that six participants were too few, especially since many of them experienced challenges in attendance, leading to program days with only one or two participants. In this delivery block as well, all of these stakeholders identified around 10 participants as ideal. Participants in the second block preferred the smaller group size, indicating that it allowed more individual discussions and that they were more confident in smaller groups. (Further discussion of the target number of participants is included in Section 7.4).

5.1 Participant Characteristics

In the first delivery block, the nine participants who completed the program ranged from 19-29 years old. Some currently had partners; the relationship status of several

⁴ ‘Participants’ include any student who attended on at least one day. Students who registered, but never attended, are not included.

participants changed during the program and others were in unstable relationships. Some were living independently, and others were living with parents or partners. Most had one child, several had two, and one was also pregnant. All were previously registered with PACE, either in the Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) program or in the regular day program; some indicated that they were actively working towards credits before the program began and others were not. About half had participated in the School for Young Moms (SYM)⁵ program at PACE. The coordinator indicated that academic ability was not an issue for most of the participants; however, they were not always confident in their own academic capacities. All but one of the participants were within five credits of completing their OSSD when they started the program. One had participated in the program over the previous two years as well. Two of the participants were working part-time when they started the program.

In the second block, the six participants who completed the program ranged in age from 18-32. Some had partners and others did not; some were living independently and others with family members or partners. Most had one child, one had two, and two were also pregnant. All were previously registered with PACE either in PLAR, the regular day program, or SYM. Academic ability was also not an issue for this group in completing their assignments. Most participants were within six credits of completing their OSSD when they started the program, with two further from graduation.

In the first block, two students did not complete the program. One participant came for one day and decided not to continue for reasons unrelated to the program, and another was not officially registered and left for reasons unrelated to the program. No post-program evaluation data was collected from these two students.

In the second block, one student registered but decided not to participate. Another student attended briefly but did not complete the program; this participant completed the pre-program questionnaire. The evaluation attempted to contact these two students for interviews to gather their feedback but was unsuccessful.

5.2 Motivation for Participation

On the program intake form in the first delivery block, participants were asked to give three reasons ‘why this program is personally suited or ideal to you.’ The most frequent responses related to gaining skills/knowledge and being a single parent/meeting other single parents, followed by obtaining credits/graduating. Two participants did not give reasons why the program was suited to them. *(Note: this section includes data for the participant who only attended for one day, since that participant also completed an intake form. No differences were noted in her data compared to other participants).*

⁵ The School for Young Moms (SYM) at PACE supports pregnant students and mothers under 24 with a child up to one year old. Students work on high school credits and develop their parenting skills, while receiving on-site care for their infants and assistance with their other needs.

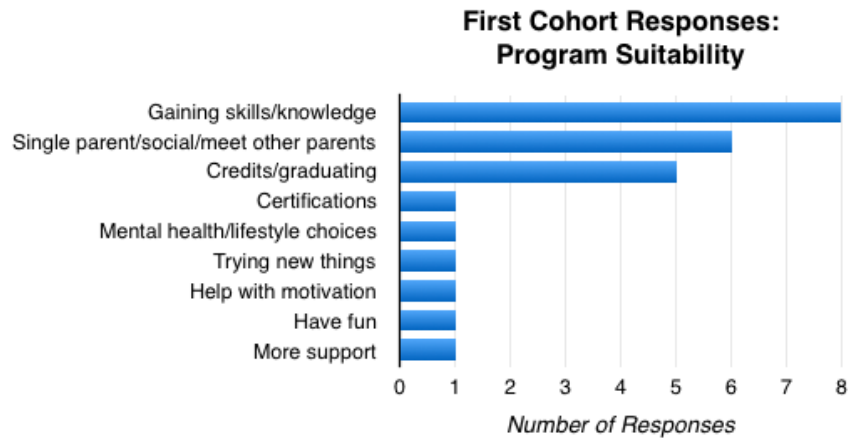


Figure 1: First Cohort Responses on Program Suitability

In the second block, the pre-program questionnaire included a question regarding the participants' motivation for participating in the program. The most frequent responses were the same as in the first cohort. (Note: this section includes data for the participant who only attended briefly, since that participant also completed a questionnaire. Some participants gave multiple reasons for participating.)



Figure 2: Second Cohort Responses on Motivation for Participating

Participant responses regarding program suitability and motivation for participation indicate that the program was successful at attracting its target audience of female single parents who were seeking to complete their OSSD, gain skills, and connect with each other and with community resources in a supportive environment.

6 PROGRAM IMPACT

Broad consensus on the impact of the program was expressed by participants, school staff, and program partners, and was supported by evidence of progress on outcomes. Data regarding specific outcomes is discussed below under food security, self-sufficiency, resilience, and positive home environment.

6.1 Key Aspects of the Program

Interviewees identified three key aspects of the program that contributed to the achievement of outcomes: creating connections, skill-building, and wellness. The connections that were established with program staff, other participants, the school community, and the larger community were the foundation of the program. The importance of each of these connections to the achievement of outcomes is detailed below. The other key aspects of the program – skill-building and wellness – are discussed in the sections on specific outcomes that follow.

6.1.1 Creating Connections

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that a major contributing factor to the program’s success in achieving outcomes was the connection that participants established with program staff, with each other, and with the school community and the larger community.

Connecting with Program Staff

In both delivery blocks, the coordinators played the central role in establishing the welcoming, supportive nature of the program, mentoring the participants, coaching them through challenging situations, and advocating for them. All participants in both blocks indicated a sense of connection to their coordinator and underlined how supportive they were in various situations. A stronger expression of connection to the coordinators was associated with higher requirements for assistance. Comments included:

- When I first started the program, I wasn’t sure if it would be a good fit. ... [The coordinator] made sure I was comfortable and checked if I needed anything.
- [The coordinator] helped us to say how we’re feeling and if we had any concerns or questions. If we were concerned we could bring it up, and not feel silly about questions. She said, “Ask as many questions as you want.”
- [The coordinator] is a really good support system. She’s the main source of support and help dealing with stuff. I had a lot of problems and she has been really helpful.
- [The coordinator] made a difference in my life, talked me through issues that I was having with [my child]’s father. She helps all of us with so many things, anything we need. She is always there for us.
- I thought it would be too busy – I’d be too overwhelmed, but [the coordinator] said, “We can accommodate your needs.”
- [The coordinator] helped me with a bunch of things, whenever I had something I needed to talk about.
- When [the coordinator] helped me with course work, she explained it a different way, and that really helped.
- [The coordinator] was so awesome. I’ve had terrible things happen and she said, “Do you want to talk?” She cares about people. She’s such a good person.
- I ... needed to talk to someone and I felt comfortable talking to [the coordinator]. We talked about things I don’t tell anyone, when I needed to vent. She totally gets it and can help me resolve things because she knows where to go.

- [The coordinator] was so positive and so comfortable talking about anything. I couldn't imagine anyone else as the teacher.
- I really really loved this program, before registering I was very nervous that it may be too fast paced for me especially because I'm pregnant and have not been having an easy pregnancy. Everyone was super accommodating for me ... I also loved our teacher, I felt super safe talking to her and she helped me A LOT over the past 10 weeks. [*written comment, emphasis in original*]
- I loved the teacher made me feel very open in talking when I needed someone [*written comment*]

Program partners and other school staff also observed that the coordinators played a key role in supporting participants; one partner stated, "They chose their coordinators really well." They noted that the coordinators gave the participants the opportunity to build a relationship with a supportive, trusting, caring adult, and indicated that the coordinators were mentors and role models for the participants. A program partner commented, "[The coordinator] had good rapport with the students. She had a good sense of who they were and what they needed, and they had a good connection with her. That connection is very important – they feel they can open up with her." Several indicated that the coordinators used their knowledge of the participants' situations to bring forward relevant discussion points during the workshop sessions and to connect them with programs and services; they also ensured that the facilitators covered what was required for the curriculum. A partner stated that, "[the coordinator] did an incredible job and they developed a great relationship. She held their hands when they needed it and encouraged them to do things themselves when they could." Another noted,

The value in the program is in overcoming poverty and the obstacles that keep people from accessing this kind of assistance. An intervention like this can be really powerful in moving people onto a new trajectory. A key factor is that [the coordinator] made the girls feel that she cared about them from the first day. She created that trust that allowed them to open up and talk about what they needed help with. She gave them a point of entry into the system so that we could offer resources to them.

Although the chef was not a school board employee, the culinary training was such a large part of the program, representing 40% of the program content, that this position had a strong influence on the success of the program. All of the program participants in both cohorts identified the culinary training as a highlight of the program; in the first block, the chef organized a tour of the St. Lawrence Market and the culinary program facilities at George Brown College, which was another program highlight for those who attended. The participants noted the chef's patience, with one remarking, "He showed us the right way to do everything. He showed us how to use the knives, not just once, but many times until we got it." Another said, "Chef is great and it should be always him." They appreciated the opportunity to take food home for their families, and to make a special meal at school and invite their family members. Several school staff described the chef as "amazing." One said, "They would tell me, 'We've got to get back to the kitchen.' They didn't want to let [the chef] down or the others when they were working together." When participants spoke of the program staff, they included both the coordinator and the

chef, considering them both to be their teachers, in contrast to the facilitators who delivered workshops.

Connecting with Peers

In the first cohort, most of the participants knew each other before the program began; some were friends and others were acquaintances. One participant did not know anyone else in the program at the outset. In the second cohort, some participants knew each other before the program, and others did not know anyone. Most of the participants built a strong network of support with each other; many indicated they had not anticipated how close they would become with other participants. They noted that this supportive environment allowed them to open up and share their experiences and to learn that others felt the same way or had gone through similar experiences. For several participants in the first and second cohort who were older than most of the others, the age gap was perceived as a barrier to strong connection; however, they stated that they were comfortable in the group and connected to the coordinator and the facilitators from the partner agencies. Other older participants did not indicate that age was a barrier in making connections to other participants. Many participant comments about connecting with peers have been included in this report to give an indication of the range and depth of support they experienced:

- I went to high school with some of them and met the others at PACE, but we became closer through the program. We all worked together. Now we have good friendships and strong connections. You feel like you can trust each other.
- I could ask questions because it was a closed environment, not in front of a group of people I didn't know.
- We also have a lot of common ground and can commiserate on some things. Everyone's been looking out for each other, and I didn't anticipate that.
- We mostly knew each other before, but now we're good friends.
- I usually don't get along with other girls, but here it was fine. I usually keep to myself, but now I feel connected to those girls.
- I liked that it was a small group. It was an opportunity to make friends. There were a couple that I knew before. We all got along, better than I was expecting.
- We all have something in common and [the coordinator] gave us the space to talk to each other. We've had really crappy partners. Everyone is going through the same thing. We build each other up – like a family.
- It was great to meet so many people and actually graduate with friends. I felt lonely a lot because I didn't have friends who knew what I was dealing with. [The coordinator] is great and the other people in the program are great. I feel lucky to have met them all. When I talked about issues, other people were saying, 'Me too.' I didn't feel annoying for talking about it like I did with people who aren't parents.
- Everybody made me want to come to school. It made it so welcoming. With the parenting program we decided on group rules and one was a 'no judgment zone.' I really liked that. It made everyone feel more welcomed. We are a lot closer now because of the program. I'm better friends with all the others. We are all parents, so we understand what it's like to have kids. I have so many new friends.

- We are so comfortable around each other now. The rules for the classroom that we did with the positive parenting – no judgment – really helped. Everything we say is confidential. We all agreed to not talk about it outside. It made everyone feel more safe.
- I feel a lot closer to them now. We support and love each other. When I was figuring out about [a major decision], I was stressed out and everyone was so supportive, [the coordinator] too. I don't think I would have been able to [make that major life change] without the program. I learned a lot.
- We built that tight bond and now we want to walk on stage together [graduate].

The post-program questionnaire asked participants to identify two aspects of the program that they enjoyed. Comments included:

- Meeting new amazing people.
- That we are so close, like a family.
- Connecting with people on a way different level.

In the first block, the coordinator noted, “I was a bit skeptical of how it was going to work out, with all of the participants knowing each other except for one, seeing them come into the program in pairs. But as a group, they took everybody in.” She indicated that they mentored each other, helping with issues that some had already faced. She also stated that several of them were very strong at standing up for anyone they felt was not heard or was unjustly treated, and that others were talented problem-solvers. For the participant who made a major life change during the program, the coordinator noted, “The support she got from the other girls to [make the change] was phenomenal. Knowing people care and that she would be OK was what supported her in doing it.” The coordinator identified “having a voice” as a key experience for the participants, indicating that as the program progressed, the participants began to open up and talk about parts of their lives that they don't normally share with everyone, and to ask the community agencies for help with their issues in front of the group. The coordinator also stated, “They had accountability to each other. If they were absent, the others would ask why they weren't there.” Similarly, in the second block, the coordinator indicated that she wondered how it would work out with the age range of participants, but she found that “they bonded over kids and their issues. They all want the same things for their kids.” She noted, “It's good not to have participants who have all the same characteristics – it brings more breadth of experience.” Several of the participants were connecting outside of the classroom, supporting each other as parents and in their other relationships.

When asked to identify the most important aspects of the program, a number of the other school staff and program partners indicated the supportive peer relationships that formed. They noted that “creating a supportive community, not feeling alone” was a key benefit to the participants. One staff member said that it was a confidence builder for the participants, doing the program together and relying on each other's support. A program partner noted, “The camaraderie is one of the most important aspects of the program. To know that you're doing OK, it's normal to have these feelings, running out of money, whatever they're experiencing is experienced by others too.” Another indicated, “They

had a strong connection with each other. For these single moms who otherwise feel like they're doing it all on their own, it's so important to have peer support." A school staff member stated, "They definitely became like family to each other. They tended to be suspicious of other girls before. They became cohesive and were doing things together with their children outside of school." Another noted, "The biggest difference that I saw was in self-confidence and social skills. I couldn't believe how much those increased. They supported each other as a group and learned to work with each other."

The evaluation followed up with the first cohort seven months after the end of their participation in the program. Most were still connected with others from their cohort and all had made new connections at work, in education, or in social groups.

Connecting with School

Research indicates that feeling connected to school is an indicator of engagement, leading to better educational outcomes. (Reschly et al., 2014) Some participants in both cohorts felt comfortable at school before the program began and had good relationships with teachers. For others, the program increased their connection to school. Participants noted:

- I like the school a lot more now. I'm more comfortable walking in. I felt judged before. This program has completely changed my experience of it. ... I didn't like sitting in a room by myself with strangers I don't know. I built connections to [the coordinator] and the other teachers, which helps.
- [The student retention counsellor] has especially helped. He has been super helpful with everything. If I need something, I can go and ask.
- This program worked better for me. It was more one-on-one. In actual high school I never knew what was going on. I was getting 50s and 60s, but here I'm getting 80s and 90s. The teachers here are more relatable, more personal. We call them by their first name – it's less formal. There's freedom, we're not being controlled for everything, even going to the bathroom.
- It helped with my anxiety to feel like I was in a safe place. I talked to [the student success teacher] a lot. I started going to the boutique more.
- I started to go to the boutique and the hot lunches. I definitely use the services a lot more now.
- I'm more comfortable now. I felt like I was part of something and I've gotten to know people more. It's been a good transition from SYM. I don't want it to end. I feel better prepared now to go into the regular program.
- I went to the hot lunches before, but I started going to the boutique with the other girls. I made friends with the lady there and she saves clothes for me.
- It was my first time using the hot lunches and the boutique. I didn't know they existed.

Both cohorts demonstrated an increased use of key supports/services at school over the course of the program, another indication of a greater connection to school (see charts below). The vice-principal's position has been included in the list of supports/services since he was directly involved in supporting the program. In the first cohort the largest

increases were in the use of the student retention counsellor, the hot lunch program, and the PACE boutique (for second-hand clothing and other items). In the second cohort, the largest increases were in accessing guidance, the vice-principal, hot lunches, the boutique, and the student success teacher.

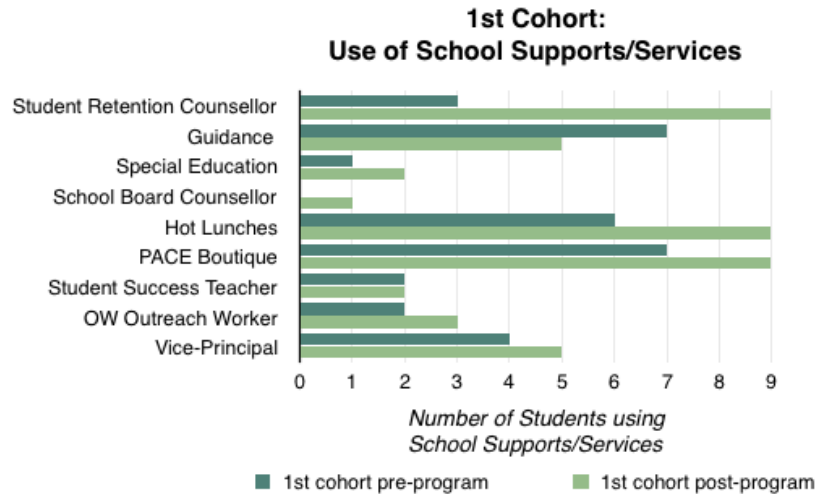


Figure 3: 1st Cohort Use of School Supports and Services

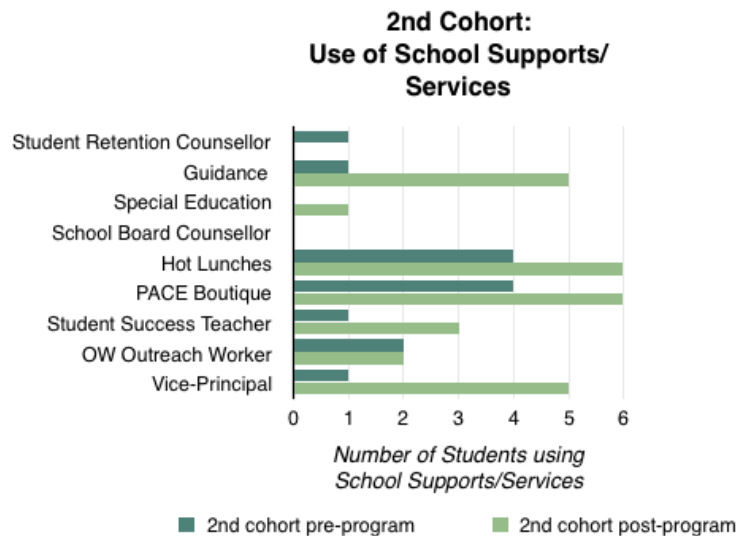


Figure 4: 2nd Cohort Use of School Supports and Services

For the first cohort, the student retention counsellor indicated an increased connection with program participants, saying, “I got to know them more and more. They would come in for a chat.” The coordinator stated that the program was instrumental in connecting the participants with school; she also noted, “It is amazing to see their success after they have struggled here in the past.” For the second cohort, there was a temporary changeover in staffing in the student retention position; whether because of this lack of

continuity in the position or because there were fewer participants who were previously connected to the student retention counsellor, less connection was made there. A school staff member noted that the second cohort was “more reserved. I would see the first group at breaks, in the hallways, with [the student retention counsellor]. They would come and tell me, ‘We had such an amazing day.’ This group was a different dynamic.”

Community Connections

Participants in both cohorts also became connected to community agencies through the workshop facilitators in the program. As the first block coordinator noted, “They know that face, and feel like they can call or go in the door. They know they won’t be judged.” In contrast to their typical experience as young single mothers, the coordinator indicated that the participants were being complimented by the facilitators, who were saying, “What an amazing group of young women.” A program partner commented, “They had access to many different organizations ... all in one place. They didn’t have to figure it all out themselves. They learned about the resources in the community: ‘If I need this, I can contact them.’” Another stated, “Meeting those people is important. It’s hard to walk into an agency, especially for a sensitive topic.” The coordinator indicated that the community agency representatives also advocated for the participants, connecting them up with resources and helping them to gain access to the programs that they needed.

The participants in both cohorts stated that they now know more about the community agencies and what programs are available, and that they feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. For example, most of the participants in the first cohort enrolled in the Youth Job Connection program at Employment Planning and Counselling (EPC) for July 2018; they connected with EPC through the program, and some of them went to EPC together to sign up. One commented, “I heard about it before, but I never went down.” By becoming familiar with EPC and with the support of her peers, she decided to register. Other participant comments about connecting with community agencies included:

- Before it was hard to seek the proper help. I didn’t know who to turn to. Now I feel 1000% more confident and I know where to go.
- They were welcoming, kind, understanding and approachable. They explained what their programs are.
- I would absolutely go to a community agency for help. We made lots of connections in the community.
- I’m more comfortable with going into the agencies now that I know people.
- It opened my eyes to what we have out there.
- Now I know the services at CMHA and that they can help in an emergency. I know where it is.
- I’d feel comfortable going now, not really comfortable before. If I am in a situation, at least now I know where to go, and it’s all free.
- Before I did this program, I thought, “Do I really need help?” But when they came in and talked about the services, I thought, “I should go in.” It’s different hearing about the services from people instead of just reading about them.

- Yes, definitely [more comfortable in accessing services]. Everyone was nice and good at communicating. Now I feel like, “I know this person, I can make an appointment.” I didn’t go in to agencies before.

In the follow-up interviews with community agencies after the second delivery block, five agencies noted that participants had accessed their services.

The benefits of these community connections went beyond the participants to include other students at PACE. For example, in the second delivery block, the Food Handler training was offered to any student in the school who wanted to participate. As well, the students in the School for Young Moms joined in for the First Aid training on choking in infants and for some of the financial literacy sessions. The coordinator also noted that the community agencies were interested in delivering sessions for other parts of the student population.

6.1.2 Skill-Building and Wellness

The other key aspects of the program were skill-building and wellness. The participants gained skills in many areas that were relevant to their lives, both in managing current situations and in moving toward their goals. These skill areas, such as culinary, financial literacy, parenting, and certifications, are detailed below under specific outcomes. As well, many program elements were designed to prevent or reduce stress in the participants’ lives and promote wellness. The connections with the coordinator, other participants, the school, and community agencies contributed to stress reduction, as did skill-building. In addition, the program included sessions on mental health, mindfulness, yoga, healthy relationships, and court support; the second block also included sessions on housing, smoking cessation, and the Healthy Smiles Ontario program. The wellness components are discussed in the sections below under specific outcomes. Participants, staff, and program partners indicated that skill-building and wellness were important elements in aiding participants to achieve their objectives.

6.1.3 Summary

As was anticipated in the program design, the aspects of connectedness, skill-building, and wellness assisted participants in achieving outcomes. All of these aspects worked together to provide participants with the foundation of support to move forward with their education and their pathway plans, and with creating a more positive home environment, as outlined in the sections on specific outcomes that follow.

6.2 Food Security

Food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as a state in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” (FAO, 2006, June, p.1) Recent research confirms that food insecurity impacts individual health and well-being: “... the experience of hunger leaves an indelible mark on

children’s physical and mental health ... Adults in food-insecure households have poorer physical and mental health ...” (Tarasuk, V. et al, 2016). The Enhanced Single Parent Program addressed immediate and longer-term food security. To increase food security immediately, the program provided culinary training, which focused on food that the participants could prepare at home as well as the nutritional and financial literacy aspects of food preparation. The chef noted “the advantages in health and economics to making your own food, for them and their families. It’s hugely important knowledge, since it affects you three times a day, every day.” He indicated,

Now they know that it’s simple to go and make food. It doesn’t have to be fancy. It’s affordable if you make your own food and it’s definitely healthier. You’ll get the right nutrients for yourself and your child. We gave them the cooking skills, talked about budgeting, costing of food materials, and so much more – the social aspect, passing on knowledge to your child, cooking together – that creates a healthy community.

School staff concurred, with one commenting:

Once they prepared their food, they sat around the table, talked about it, and about life in general. Hopefully that has an impact on their home lives, as a model, to sit down all together and eat. This is the outcome – food security – everybody has food and is sitting at the table together. That captures the essence of the program. They are comfortable in preparing food and then sharing it together, talking among themselves. I was so impressed by them – they always came to invite me and if I couldn’t come, they brought a plate of food over. They were proud to share what they made. A lot had to happen to make this plate of food. If they can transfer that to their family, all the skills they learned are reflected in that moment.

All of the participants in both cohorts indicated that they were using the skills that they learned at home (program target: 80%), and several noted that they didn’t cook at home previously and were now confident in preparing food for their family. Participant comments included:

- Culinary was my favourite. I learned to cook for my family. I’ve made almost everything at home and really liked it.
- I never cooked before, but now I enjoy it and I can make good food.
- I really liked the cooking, it was more hands-on, how to make healthy meals. I cook a lot in general, but I learned more different ways to make things, and we’ll get a recipe book at the end.
- I really liked the cooking, and I’m using it at home. I did cook before but now I am making things from scratch.
- I only cooked basic food before. I’m using it at home – I’ve cooked a couple of recipes.
- Since we did culinary, I liked it, I like to cook and bake. I didn’t know I liked it that much. It’s satisfying and relaxing.
- I picked up cooking at home, and now I’m doing it from scratch instead of buying things. It’s improved the quality of what we eat at home.

- I cook a lot more at home now. I'm using new recipes and I'm cooking with new ingredients.
- I never cooked at home. I want to keep cooking now.
- I really liked the cooking. I did all the culinary classes at [high school], but it was still helpful. There were some things I didn't know, and then I was able to help others too. We got new recipes and I can make some things my [child] really likes, like hummus.
- Now I make healthy food at home.
- I knew nothing before [about cooking] and it really helped at home. ... I'm using it now.

The participants from the first cohort who were interviewed seven months after they finished the program stated that they were continuing to cook and to use the skills they had learned at home. One indicated, "The cooking was the most useful part. I really, really enjoyed it. I use the cookbook." Another noted, "I've used some of the recipes and I am working in food service now."

Other immediate food security supports included the participants taking home food that they prepared in the culinary sessions; several participants noted their appreciation of this extra food for their families. The program also connected participants who had not previously been using these services with food support provided to the school community through hot lunches on Fridays; a participant indicated, "I like the hot lunches – it's great to be feeding this many people." The first cohort also made strong connections to the student retention counsellor, who brought food and other essentials from Kawartha Food Share to school. The coordinator indicated that participants used these supplies for their families, and that some were helping to support other family members as well. Participants in the first cohort also received plants for their homes; one participant indicated, "I have a garden and I planted tomatoes, cucumber, and chives. I only had flowers before."

Finally, the program addressed financial literacy in family management, looking at ways to make the most effective use of their income and to avoid financial pitfalls that would affect their ability to have access to nutritious food (more details on the financial literacy component are included below in Section 6.4.2). It also connected participants with community resources for immediate assistance with food security, such as the Food Box, gleaning, community gardens, and community kitchens. Participant comments included:

- The community gardens are interesting – there is one down my street.
- I'm going to sign up for the cooking course at Public Health and the Food Box program.
- The Food Box is great since fruits and vegetables are really expensive. I'm going to sign up for that.
- I liked going to the farmer's market to buy local food.
- This program opened doors for her, like Nourish. She loved it in the kitchen. She's a good cook.

On follow-up at seven months, one of the first cohort participants indicated that she had connected with food security community resources and two stated an intent to do so in the future.

Participants in both cohorts rated their knowledge and experience in culinary, financial/budgeting, and community food supports before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.⁶ Values ranged from ‘No knowledge or experience’ (0) to ‘Very knowledgeable or experienced’ (3). The following charts display the average of their ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program. Some participants in both cohorts had experience in the food service industry or had participated in similar programs.

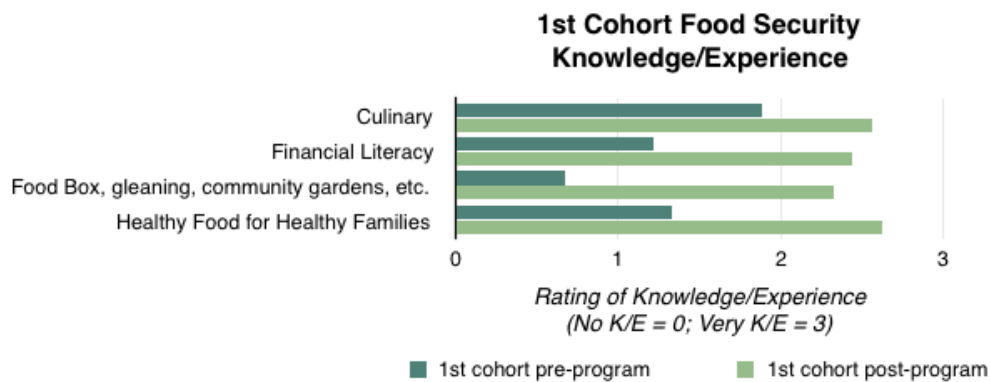


Figure 5: 1st Cohort Food Security Knowledge/Experience

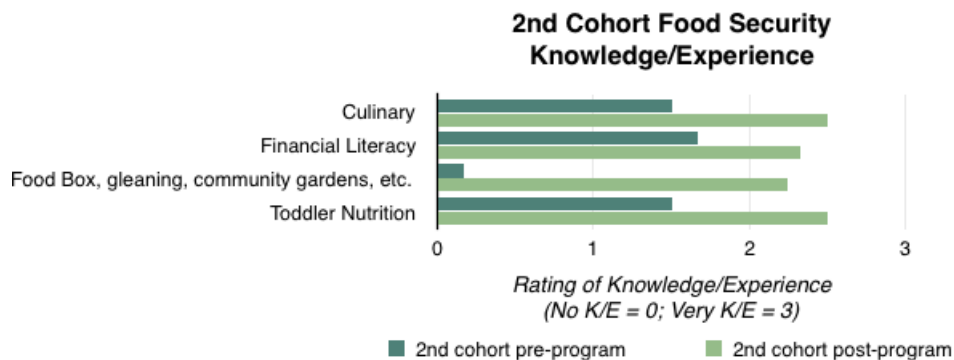


Figure 6: 2nd Cohort Food Security Knowledge/Experience

⁶ Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants in the first cohort on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data was collected before the participants began the program.

6.2.1 Summary

The program’s goal was to increase immediate food security through culinary training and various food supports, as well as financial literacy related to family management. (Longer-term food security is linked to the self-sufficiency outcome discussed in the next section.) Participants in both cohorts met all of the short-term outcomes and two out of three medium-term outcomes related to immediate food security (see charts below). For the third medium-term outcome, the evaluation followed up with first cohort participants after seven months to determine whether they were accessing food security-related community resources; one of the participants was accessing them and two stated an intent to access them in the future. Another was advocating for the installation of a community garden in her housing complex. Participants in both cohorts stated that the culinary training increased the quantity and quality of the food that they made at home, and the financial literacy sessions increased their ability to manage their personal finances.

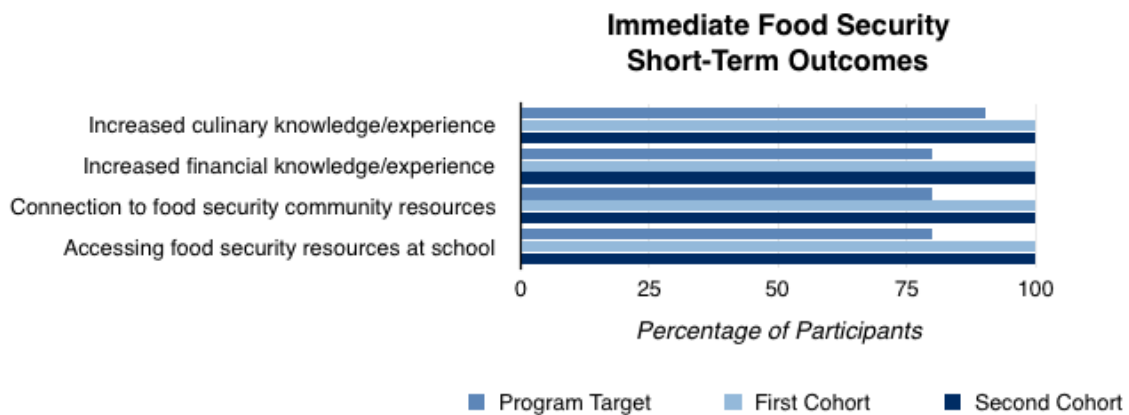


Figure 7: Immediate Food Security Short-Term Outcomes

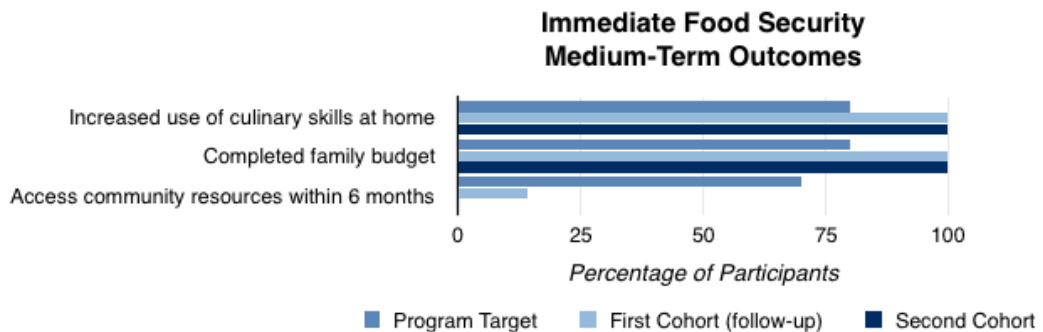


Figure 8: Immediate Food Security Medium-Term Outcomes

6.3 Self-Sufficiency

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing self-sufficiency through education, training, employment, and connections with relevant community agencies. Participants received assistance with completing their OSSD and with their pathway plan for post-secondary education, training, and employment.

6.3.1 Education

All of the participants in both cohorts who completed the program were registered at PACE before the program began. In the first cohort, nine out of 11 participants (82%) completed the program, and in the second cohort, six out of seven (86%) completed the program (the program target was 90%). For those who completed the program in the first cohort, school staff and participants indicated that it was effective at increasing attendance and engagement. For the second cohort, attendance was a major issue; however, school staff, participants, and partner agencies noted high levels of engagement when the participants were able to attend.

Attendance

In the first cohort, nine participants completed the program. Three of these participants began on the first day and the others began within the first two weeks. Attendance was calculated for the participants who completed the program based on the first day that they attended. Individual attendance ranged from 68% to 96%, with an average of 81% and a median of 80% (program target: 80%). Five out of nine participants attended 80% or more of the sessions. Participant comments regarding attendance included:

- I feel like this program has helped me with attending every day.
- I definitely come to school more. Sitting in class every day is boring. This is enjoyable, I liked it better, and it made me want to come more.
- Sometimes things are chaotic, and I missed more days than I should have. In the past I had issues with absenteeism.

The first block coordinator noted that some students had been coming to school regularly before they were involved in the program but were not spending their time in the classroom or were struggling to complete assignments. One was registered at PACE but not attending. Another's attendance was very sporadic before the program, but excellent once she became involved. Participants and school staff identified two major challenges in daily attendance: appointments and changes in their lives outside of school. Several participants had a number of appointments for themselves or their children that affected their attendance. One participant had a major change in her life and missed a week of the program; other issues included changes in housing and in relationships, and sick children.

In the second cohort, six participants completed the program. Five started on the first day and the sixth joined the program at the beginning of the second week. Individual attendance ranged from 32% to 77%, with an average of 50% and a median of 49%. None of the participants achieved the target attendance rate of 80%. Participants

indicated that they were motivated to attend, but were prevented from doing so because of childcare, medical issues, and transportation problems. School staff and partner agencies agreed that participants were fully engaged when they were able to attend, and the coordinator communicated the content of workshops to those who were unable to attend them. Program partners also noted that the smaller group made it easier to address individual needs, but that the attendance issues impacted their ability to build from one session to the next. Partners with similar clientele indicated that attendance was often a challenge in their programs as well.

Engagement

Research by Reschly, Christenson, and colleagues demonstrated that levels of student engagement can be determined by examining four types of engagement: academic, behavioural, affective, and cognitive (Reschly et al, 2007; 2014). In this evaluation, indicators were selected for each of these types, including credits earned, attendance, participation in class, sense of belonging, relationships with teachers and peers, and perceptions of program relevance.

Participants in both cohorts and school staff concurred that the program was effective in increasing student engagement. Participants noted that the hands-on training was well suited to their learning style and the small group format allowed them to share experiences. In the first cohort, eight out of nine participants (89%) who completed the program reported increased engagement in school (target: 80%). In the second cohort, five out of six participants (83%) reported increased engagement. Participants commented:

- I actually enjoy coming to school. I like the hands-on part. I enjoyed all the stuff we got to do.
- I liked the program a lot more than the big classroom with lots of students where you have to sit and write all the time. I'm a hands-on person. It made me motivated to come to school.
- Definitely this program was a good chance to get back into school. I always liked doing programs that had a schedule and routine to it. I lack dedication and motivation for a self-paced program.
- I've been in and out of PACE for three years. This is the first time I've stayed in, because of PLAR and this program. I actually wanted to go to school. It's a lot more fun to be in a classroom full of people who you know and you can relate to all of them.
- I've spent four years trying to finish school. This is the first time I came to school and stayed. I had more motivation to come, with the certifications and the practical classes.
- I'm definitely more motivated. Before I had no interest in school, and I didn't think I'd get this far. I didn't know how many credits I had to do.
- I really like more hands-on rather than sitting and doing work. I'm more confident in smaller groups. It makes me want to come more.

Indicators of engagement included participant perceptions of relevance of program content, as well as asking questions in class and participating in class. All participants in both cohorts indicated that they considered the program content to be relevant to them, with one commenting, “It’s all stuff you should be having in regular high school. I kept thinking, ‘Why didn’t anyone teach me this before?’” Participants were also asked to rate themselves on how often they asked questions in class and participated in class before the program⁷ and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). For the first cohort, the pre-program average for asking questions in class was 1.9; at the end of the program, the average was 3.4. For participation in class, the pre-program average was 2.1; post-program, the participation average was 3.6. Values increased for 8 out of 9 participants (89%) for ‘asking questions in class’ and for all participants in ‘participate in class’ (target: 80%). For the second cohort, the pre-program average for asking questions in class was 2.7; post-program, it was 3.3. For participation in class, the pre-program average was 3.0, and post-program, it was 3.5. Values increased for 5 out of 6 participants (83%) for both ‘asking questions in class’ and ‘participate in class’ (target: 80%). Regarding one participant, the coordinator noted, “She was quiet for the first few weeks, then she opened up. With 30 students in class, she probably never would. She said, ‘I would never talk about this in front of people.’”

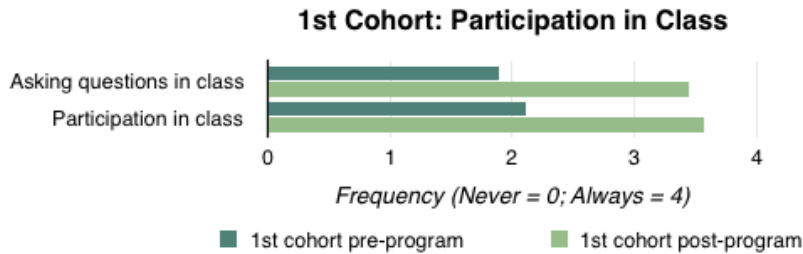


Figure 9: 1st Cohort Participation in Class

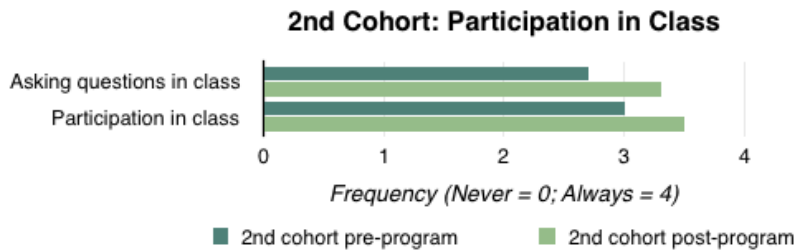


Figure 10: 2nd Cohort Participation in Class

⁷ Note: For the first cohort, the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. For the second cohort, this data was collected before the participants began the program.

School staff noted that the varied program content contributed to engagement. The vice-principal indicated that the alternative education setting offers an opportunity for students to work at their own pace and continue on from the point where they left off in school; however, “if the underlying issue [that caused students to stop school] is still present, then it is difficult to complete their education.” He stated, “The 10-week program gives an intensive experience that is very motivating, since there’s always something happening.”

Program partners indicated that the program format and the coordinator’s role were key in engaging the participants. Comments included:

- I loved the way [the coordinator] worked with the students, focusing on what their needs were and what they wanted. That resulted in attendance and buy-in from the students. The program nailed the different components – parenting, food – with the combination of ongoing and one-off sessions.
- They were given autonomy and treated like adults, which was empowering for them.
- The participants were all very engaged. ... In both groups, if someone had a question, everyone shared and inputted what they knew.
- [The coordinator] did an amazing job. She had their trust, they were engaged, to come back tomorrow. ... She was fabulous, and they really liked her.
- The advantage of this approach is that they are getting things that are not available in the regular classroom. There are hidden obstacles to their success in traditional classrooms and the other kids are judgmental.
- The importance of the program is in the speed with which they complete their goals, which helps to keep on track. It also shows them the softer social side, the skills in negotiating.

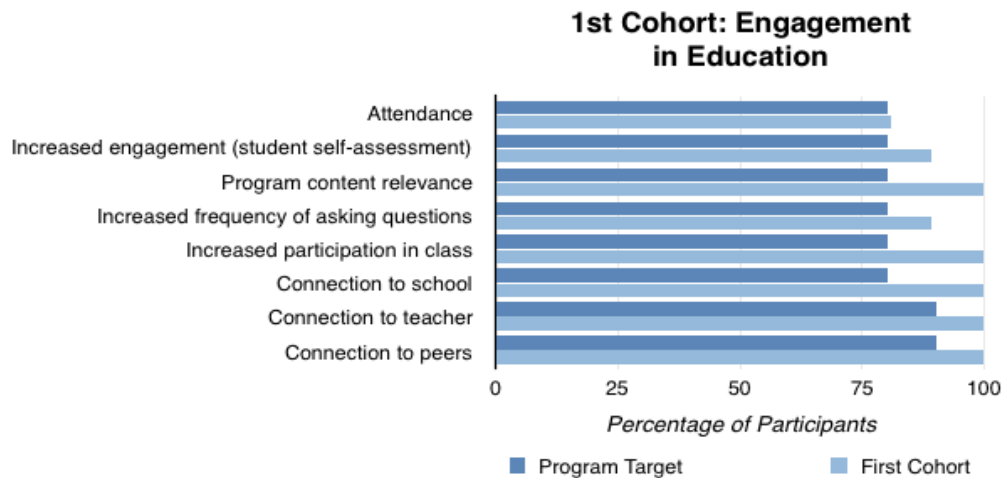


Figure 11: 1st Cohort Engagement in Education

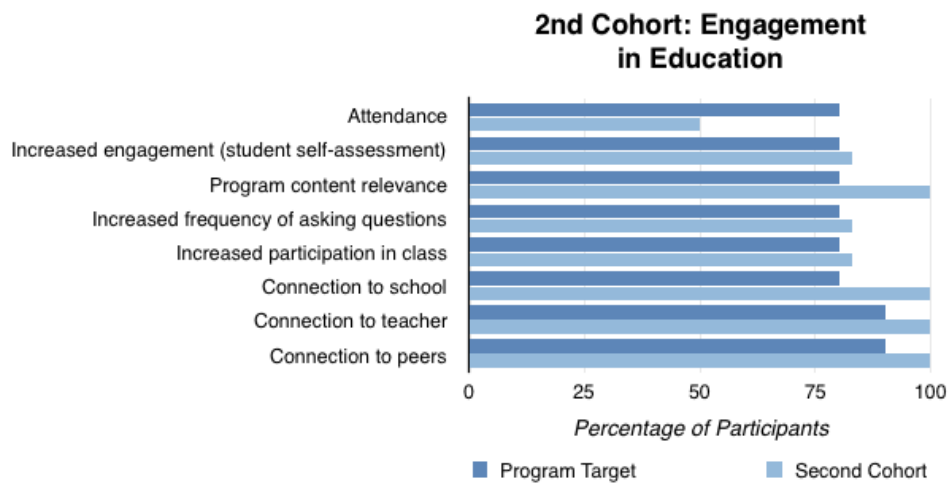


Figure 12: 2nd Cohort Engagement in Education

Challenges to engagement noted by school staff and program partners in the first delivery block were punctuality and cell phone use during program time. Some participants frequently arrived late and returned late from break time; others were more reliable. Cell phone use during program time was very common. Most interviewees indicated the need to find the balance between a warm, welcoming environment with low barriers to participation and the expectations that participants will face in further education and the working world. Several program delivery partners suggested having a discussion at the beginning of the program to make expectations clear and involve the participants in establishing ground rules around attendance, punctuality, and cell phone use. Some participants were on time and engaged in the sessions. For others, the participants themselves and school staff stated that they were present and engaged in the program more than they had previously been at school; this indication of increased engagement in comparison to past performance demonstrates progress toward these outcomes.

In the second delivery block, the coordinator implemented the recommendation for a discussion on expectations at the outset of the program and program partners noted that the group was respectful and engaged, “wanting to learn and to be there.” Numerous interviewees indicated that the dynamics were different in the second group, which they attributed both to the smaller group size and the personalities of the participants. Several noted that the coordinator played a greater role in engaging the participants in the workshops; one indicated that the coordinator “was very strong with group dynamics. She was good at engaging everyone and interjected good comments and questions. ... That’s great, because the participants see the value that the workshop has for the teacher and they buy in too.”

Credit Acquisition

The skills and experience acquired through the training sessions and workshops contributed to credit acquisition; all participants who completed the program in the first

cohort earned three credits through the program, with one participant earning four credits (target: 80% earning 3 credits). As well, three participants earned an additional credit in parallel to the program, and one participant earned two additional credits. In the second cohort, four participants earned three credits, one earned five, and one earned a credit (83% earned at least 3 credits). The coordinator noted, “Some of them didn’t get all their credits because they weren’t here enough.” However, the students were able to compensate for some of their absences through completion of assignments. Three participants partially completed credits through the program; the coordinator recorded the curriculum expectations that had been met and communicated with the other teachers, so that the students could complete the remaining expectations for those courses and then receive the credits. The coordinator noted that the other teachers at PACE were flexible about pausing the work in their classes or passing it along so that the students could continue to work on those credits while they were in the program.

Several participants indicated that for students who complete most of their OSSD at PACE, there are limited options for electives, and they appreciated the possibility of obtaining elective credits through the program. Participant comments on credit acquisition included:

- I joined PACE two months before. In the normal classroom, it was boring, and I did one credit in a couple of months. In this program, I got Smart Serve and other certifications and three credits in 10 weeks. I felt more part of PACE.
- I registered at PACE a couple of years ago but in this school where you have to be self-driven I never completed anything. ... I needed four credits in day school and I get three credits for this program. I’ll be finishing [the final credit] in the next week.
- It took me a long time to get a credit [in the past]. This course gave me three credits in 10 weeks. I wasn't expecting it to have such an impact.
- The work was straightforward, and I could get so much done. The program made it easy to get three credits.
- I still have tons and tons of credits to finish. I missed a lot – I expected to get more credits out of the program, but I missed too much time because of [my family situation].
- Without this program, I might have given up on school. ... I was struggling with school. This program made it easier.
- This program helps single moms get schooling. It’s hard to go to school with a baby or a toddler. For a single parent, it’s even harder.

Enrolment in Additional Courses

In the first cohort, the two participants who did not graduate in June 2018 both indicated that they were enrolled in additional courses for the following semester (target: 90% of those who had not completed OSSD). In the second cohort, all of the participants who completed the program enrolled immediately in additional courses. Comments from the participants included:

- I finished PLAR before the program and I have two credits to go, so I’ll be back in the fall. It’s exciting to be so close to graduating.

- I'm on my last credit now, and I only have three lessons to go. It really dragged on before and I didn't come half the time.
- I plan to enroll in my final credits right away.
- I only have five credits to go altogether. I'll get [three] here and then I want to jump right back in. I'm super excited about graduation.
- I'm going right into regular classes on Monday.

Graduation

All but one of the participants in the first cohort who completed the program were within five credits of completing their OSSD; several were also finishing their portfolios for senior PLAR. Of the eight participants who were close to completing their OSSD, seven finished their remaining requirements through the program or in parallel to it and graduated in June 2018. The target for the program is an 80% graduation rate within one year of program completion; the participants in the first delivery block attained a 78% graduation rate at program completion. In the second cohort, all of the participants still had credits to complete after the program. Four participants were on track to graduate by the end of the school year, with the two remaining participants projected to graduate the following year. Participants and school staff had the following comments regarding graduation:

- A lot of us girls didn't think we'd graduate. [The coordinator] stayed after school and helped us with our credits. This gave me three credits and [the coordinator] said, 'We can work on the other credits.' I'm going to be graduating at the end of this year. I didn't think it would happen.
- I'm excited and happy that I'm graduating. I'm only a year behind [my class] and with a child. When I started I had 26 credits to go. I thought it would take forever.
- I didn't think I would ever graduate. My parents weren't supportive. Now I'm accepted into college for September.
- I'm finally going to graduate. I dropped out at 16.
- I wouldn't be graduating this year without the program.
- I'm going to graduate. I'm excited – it's finally happening.
- When I heard about the program, I thought, "Whatever, I just want to get done." Now having gotten 3 credits done ... for the longest time I didn't think I would be able to graduate, and now I can graduate this year. I'm motivated to get the rest done.
- I'll graduate next year. I'm excited about graduation – it's an extra step forward.
- The program spurred her motivation, getting so many credits so quickly. Graduation seemed far off for her before, but now she will hopefully be done next year.
- She wants to finish high school, but life is getting in the way. The motivation is there but life circumstances are preventing her.
- She's the first to graduate in her family.

Participants and school staff attributed the high graduation rate in the first cohort to the momentum created through the program. One school staff member commented, "They

worked quickly through their credits and some were able to use what they did in the program to complete their portfolios for senior PLAR so they could graduate. Being part of the program really did give them more drive to finish. It made them see that they could graduate.”

In the follow-up with the first cohort, one of the participants noted, “It’s wonderful to graduate, and it has even more impact now that my younger sister is living with me. She struggles in the school environment, but I can tell her to register here [at PACE] and say, “Even though we have had setbacks, I finished, and you can finish.”

Pathway Planning

All participants in both the first and the second cohort reported increased knowledge regarding their chosen pathway (the program target was 90%). Most received coaching/mentoring from the coordinator regarding their pathway plan and several reported receiving assistance from the guidance counsellor and student success teacher as well. In the first cohort, all participants reported being more prepared to start on their pathway than before the program (target: 90%); in the second cohort, 5 out of 6 participants (83%) reported being more prepared.

Post-Secondary Education

In the first cohort, six participants went on the field trip to Toronto to see the culinary program facilities at George Brown College, which was a highlight of the program for those participants. They indicated that touring the college gave them a better understanding of what this type of college program entailed. The chef noted, “I was very happy to introduce them to Toronto, take them to the college. It’s a different world out there. ... We only have them for a short time – 10 weeks – to give them some idea of what’s out there.”

Two of the participants were accepted into college at the end of the first block. The coordinator noted, “Academically, most are very strong. I said, ‘You need to just go to college,’ to challenge them to take the next step.” Others were planning to work first and apply to post-secondary later, and some were not planning to engage in post-secondary education. The two participants who had not yet finished their OSSD plan to attend college once they complete their final credits. In the second cohort, all of the participants were planning to attend post-secondary; one had been accepted into college pending the completion of her final credit. Comments included:

- I applied to business and accounting at Fleming for September and got accepted. I knew what I wanted to do and I talked to [the coordinator] about it. She said it’s OK to go in and if I don’t like it, I can change courses. It’s OK if it doesn’t work out. It made me think I’d give it a try.
- A lot of people came in who were involved in different aspects of community service, so that gave me ideas on what career path I’d like to take and what college courses I could do. I want to help others in the community because I needed help and I understand them.

- I'm accepted into college for September in child and youth care. I want to help kids who are going through difficult times. It helped to have different people come in and give different ideas.
- I can't afford college right now, and I'm not really interested.
- I want to go to college. ... I don't want to jump in right away. I want to do something I will actually pursue. I have all the requirements, all the credits so whatever I choose I can do.
- In January I want to start the Paramedic program at Fleming. Having the First Aid and CPR will help me with that.
- I'd like to do something in the medical area – dental, nursing, social worker – something to improve people's health. ... Once [my child] is in daycare, I'll go to college. Now that I'm getting closer to graduation, it's motivating to think about. I feel like this is going somewhere – it's an exciting moment.
- I went on a tour of Fleming last year and I was excited but also discouraged because it was too far off. Now I feel like I can actually do it.
- I want to be a registered dietician. I was thinking about it before, but now I know that's what I want to do.
- I'm interested in the [culinary] program at Fleming.
- I liked the First Aid and CPR. I asked the instructor about what careers were related to that.
- My plan is to do something in the medical administrative field, like a secretary. One step at a time – I'll finish high school, then maybe do an online course for six months, and then enroll at Fleming.

In the follow-up with the first block participants, one was finishing high school credits, two returned to PACE to complete or upgrade college-level credits in preparation for post-secondary studies, one was planning to work before entering college, and three were working. One of those was saving money to attend college; she noted, "The place I am working now is flexible about working around going to school, so I can continue to work part-time."

6.3.2 Training/Certifications

The participants in both cohorts received 19 days of culinary skills training delivered by a professional chef. These culinary skills focused on food preparation, nutrition, cleanliness, and safety. The average attendance rate for the culinary training in the first block was 78%, ranging from 44% to 100% with a median of 84% (target: 80%). In the second block, the average attendance for culinary training was 52%, ranging from 25% to 85% with a median of 50%. Participants received additional culinary training through PPH and Nourish. All participants in both blocks indicated that the culinary training was a highlight of the program. Participants commented:

- I liked trying new things. I knew some of the techniques, but I learned other techniques like holding knives properly – [the chef] was very big on safety first. That was great – I brought it home and taught [my child]. [My child] wants to help in the kitchen. I also tried new ingredients.

- I haven't tried the recipes at home, but I use the techniques, like how to dice an onion. My former partner was a picky eater so that limited what kind of recipes I could make. [My child] is more adventurous and loved the food I brought home from the course.
- Culinary was my favourite part. I knew how to cook already but I liked learning to cook so many different things. I'm using the techniques at home.
- I really liked the cooking. I learned things I didn't know before, like how to hold knives and proper techniques.
- At [high school] there was one chef and lots of us – here I could ask questions.
- Cooking was a great opportunity, and I wish more people could do [this program].

All participants in both cohorts reported an increase in their knowledge about the requirements for working in a culinary job (target: 80%). Participant comments included:

- The course helped me be better prepared if I do want a culinary job. I learned the terms and how to do certain things.
- The program has helped me to feel more comfortable working with food. With the certifications we got, I could go work in the food industry.
- Working in a culinary job is not something I ever want to do. It's so busy and pressured.
- I used to want to do culinary, and then I switched to accounting, but after this program I want to do culinary again.
- Yes, I do [know more about culinary jobs]. Now I have Smart Serve and Food Handlers.
- I'm better prepared to work in a culinary job. I'm not scared to do it. I've had three different chefs [in three years of participating in the program] so I learned different ways to do things and we cooked different things with each one.

Participants in the first cohort had the opportunity to earn a number of employment-related certifications through the program: Smart Serve, Food Handlers, First Aid, and Customer Service and Point of Sale training. Three participants already had their Food Handlers certification; the other six completed theirs in the program. Two participants already had Smart Serve certification, and six more received it through the program (89%). Eight received First Aid certification (89%), and six received the Customer Service/Point of Sale training (67%). The program target was an 80% completion rate per certification. In the second cohort, four participants earned their Food Handlers certification (67%), two already had Smart Serve and three received it through the program (83%), and four received First Aid certification (67%). Participants noted that the certifications were a motivation for joining the program and could be useful in certain post-secondary programs as well as in employment. School staff indicated that participants were proud of the certifications that they earned. Comments from participants and school staff included:

- It's amazing – I didn't think I would ever get that certification [First Aid]. It's a big help in trying to get jobs.
- I appreciated the extra training – the First Aid, Smart Serve, Safe Food Handling, and Point of Sale. Most of the time you would have to pay for these, so that removed a barrier.

- The EPC helped with my resume and First Aid. I already had Smart Serve, but I got my Food Handlers updated. It's expensive to do these certifications.
- I was excited to get the certifications, because they are really helpful for work.
- I am glad we are doing the Point of Sale training. Some have had it before, but it's good experience.
- When we did Point of Sale training, [one of the students] said, "I could do this. I could be a waitress."
- She was upset that she missed the Food Handler's certification day, but now she knows she can get the course outline online and then just do the test at Public Health.

6.3.3 Employment

In the first delivery block, a resume building session was held at the very end of the program and demonstrated the options for presentation of skills and experience. Seven out of nine participants (78%) took part in the Resume Building workshop (target: 80%). One of the participants who missed the workshop already had a resume. Even the participants without work experience were able to prepare a resume based on the skills they gained through the program. The facilitator indicated, "The program allowed them to get the building blocks in place for resume writing. Doing the resume at the end was good timing. ... They gained so much confidence and competencies – they didn't realize how much until they did their resumes." Participant interviews were conducted before this final session was completed, and so no specific feedback on the session was gathered from them; however, a number of participants indicated that they were anticipating the session and eager to have a completed resume to move forward with their job search. In the second delivery block, the resume building workshop was held on a day with only one participant present. The coordinator made the workshop materials available to the group and everyone completed a resume by the end of the program.

Two of the participants in the first cohort were working part-time at the onset of the program; however, for various reasons, both left their jobs during the program. Several of the participants planned to enter the workforce after the program finished, and others planned to work until they started post-secondary education. In the second cohort, none of the participants were working at program onset. One became employed near the end of the program and missed several days because of her work schedule. Comments regarding employment included:

- I am thinking about working in a culinary job. I like cooking at home, and I could fall back on that.
- I feel a lot more prepared to look for an actually good job instead of stocking shelves.
- This program will really help with things for my resume and I can use the experience I gained here.
- I'm more prepared, and now I have an updated resume. I want to work for a while and I'd like to find a job related to my goals so that I can make sure that's what I want to do.

- After [graduation] I'm going to start working to get some money, move into a better place. I think I'll work a bit less than a year and then work part-time in college. I only worked once before, and I want to get more work experience.

Two participants in the first cohort indicated an interest in self-employment; both had skills that would lend themselves to starting their own businesses. One had training and experience in her chosen field and noted that she planned to hire other program participants once her business was underway. The other planned to find a position assisting an established business to gain experience before starting her own business. She stated, "I'll slowly but surely get into it myself."

Finally, seven out of nine participants (78%) in the first cohort were connected or planning to connect with EPC to assist them in their job search (target: 70%), most through the Youth Job Connection program that offers paid training as well as work placements. Several had used EPC's services in the past, and some had only become familiar with EPC through the program. Seven out of nine participants (78%) reported increased engagement in pursuing their pathway and were implementing the initial steps of their pathway plan (target: 80%). One participant was planning to take time with her newborn before initiating her pathway plan steps. In the second cohort, all participants stated an interest in connecting with employment resources or had done so in the past. Four out of six participants (67%) indicated increased engagement in pursuing their pathway. Two had implemented the initial steps of their pathway plan; the others were focused on completing their OSSD or on caring for a newborn before initiating their pathway plan steps. Comments by the program partner, the participants, and the coordinator included:

- They've taken hold of the seriousness of it. I was so proud to see one young lady say, "I have a job, but I really hate it," and she applied to the youth program.
- I'm going to EPC in July to do the Youth Job Connection program to help find work. They will help to find us a placement where we feel comfortable. I did the Jobs for Youth program at EPC before and the coordinator is great.
- The other girls are doing Job Connect but I would need daycare. I may be doing that training.
- A couple of us are doing [the Youth Job Connects program] together. Maybe we'll have our placement in the same spot. I want to be placed [to have help finding a job]. ...I've never done anything with EPC before.
- I'm going to EPC now. I went through EPC before and I really like them.
- I would go to EPC. My boyfriend went there and a lot of people I know have gone through EPC. It's a positive place to go.
- I'd go to EPC. I'd feel more confident to go now.
- I have done things through EPC before and knew they were cool. I'm going to Youth Job Connection this summer.
- EPC was a good connection for her to make. She wouldn't have done the summer EPC program without this program.

In follow-up interviews with first cohort participants, many indicated that they had participated in the Youth Job Connection program over the summer and three were still working at their placements. Comments included:

- I did Youth Job Connection. I'm still working at my placement. I'm the weekend manager at [a workplace].
- The EPC program was good. They helped me to rebuild my resume and I renewed my Food Handlers certification. I got a placement [in food service] in September and I've been working there since then.
- The program was really good and it was great to get a placement. It was definitely a lot easier to get a job that way. [The job] was seasonal, but I was hired on to stay. I love working there.

Participants rated their knowledge and experience in certifications and resume-building before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.⁸ (Ratings for culinary-related topics are included above in Section 7.2 on Food Security). Values ranged from 'No knowledge or experience' (0) to 'Very knowledgeable or experienced' (3). The following chart displays the average of their ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program. As noted above, some participants had completed certifications in the past and/or had already prepared a resume.

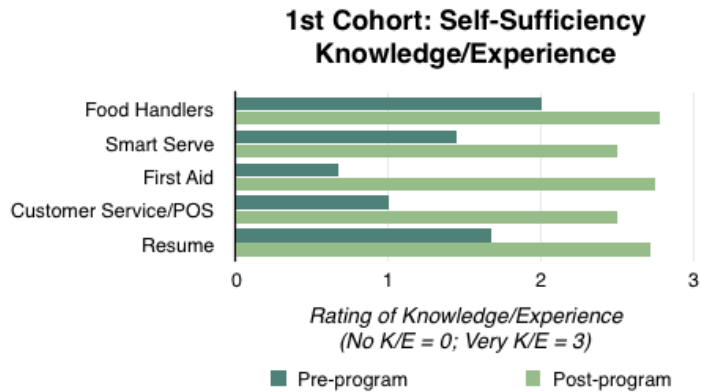


Figure 13: 1st Cohort Self-Sufficiency Knowledge/Experience

⁸ Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data was collected before the participants began the program.

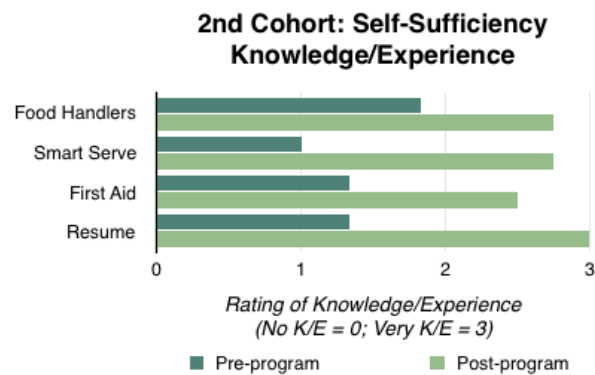


Figure 14: 2nd Cohort Self-Sufficiency Knowledge/Experience

6.3.4 Summary

The program’s goal was to increase longer-term food security and self-sufficiency through education, training, and employment. For the education component of the program, most participants in the first cohort had met the short and medium-term outcomes of the program, and seven out of nine had completed the long-term outcome of obtaining their OSSD, with the remaining two enrolled in further high school courses (target: 80% graduation rate within one year of completing the program). On follow-up after seven months, both were still working on their OSSD. Similarly, for the career pathway component, most participants had met the program’s short and medium-term outcomes. The follow-up with participants after seven months found that, of the seven who participated in interviews, three were engaged in employment and three in education (target: 80% engaged in EET within six months of completing their OSSD).

In the second cohort, all participants had met the short-term educational outcomes, with most meeting the medium-term outcomes. All were enrolled in further courses immediately following the program; four were on track to graduate by June 2019, with two planning to graduate the following year. For the career pathway component, most participants had met the short and medium-term outcomes of the program, with the exception of implementing the initial steps of their pathway plan and accessing pathway resources, since they had not graduated yet. One participant was employed at the end of the program.

Participants in both cohorts indicated that their participation in the program created momentum and a belief that they could achieve their goal of graduating. For most of the first cohort, who completed the program at the end of the school year, this momentum carried on into the search for summer or longer-term employment and the pursuit of post-secondary education.

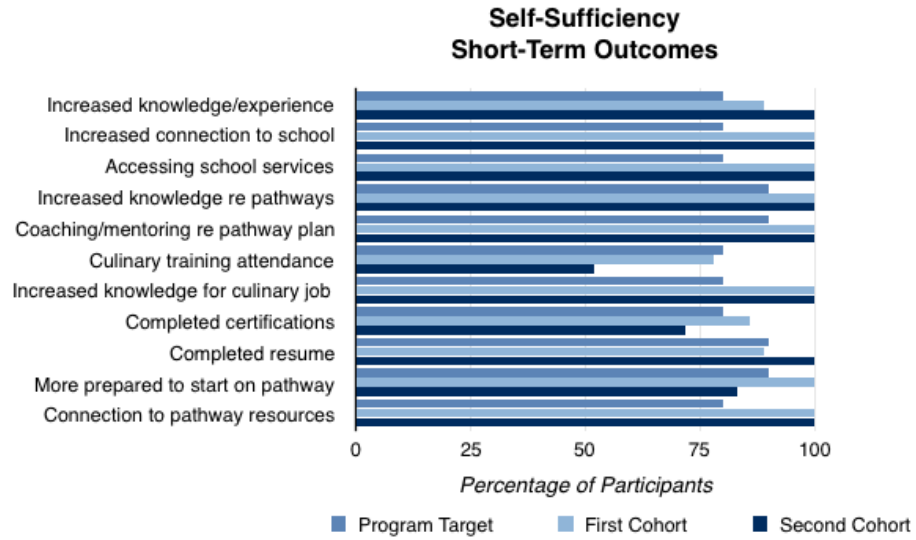


Figure 15: Self-Sufficiency Short-Term Outcomes

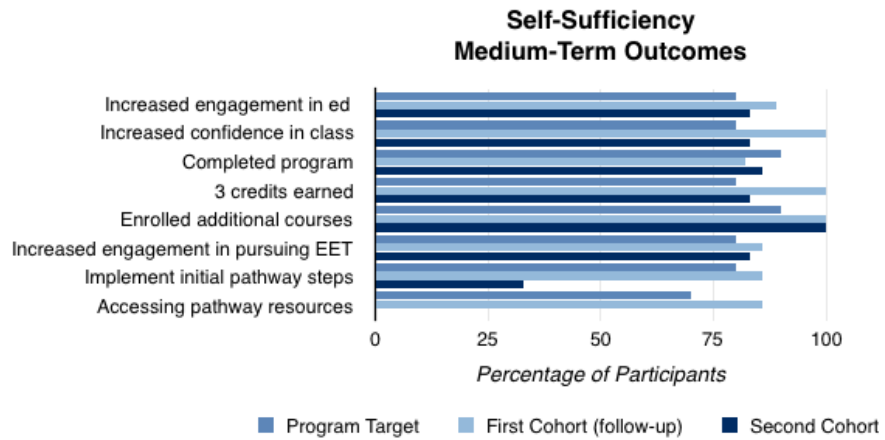


Figure 16: Self-Sufficiency Medium-Term Outcomes

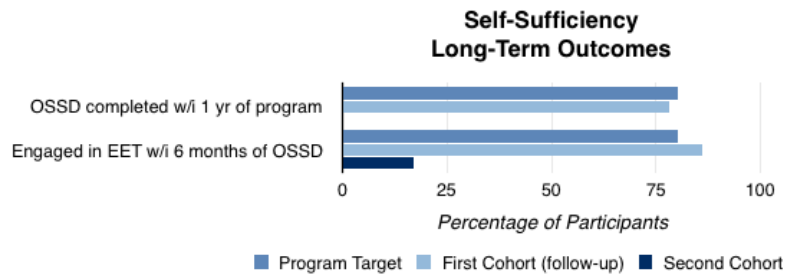


Figure 17: Self-Sufficiency Long-Term Outcomes

6.4 Resilience

Resilience has been a focus of research for decades, given its role in health and the management of challenges across the lifespan. (Windle, 2010) Many definitions of resilience as well as approaches to measuring it have been proposed. This evaluation adopts the definition proposed by Windle through an extensive review of the literature and concept analysis of resilience research: "... resilience is defined as the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity." (1) Windle concludes that interventions designed to increase resilience may address the context in which people live, services and treatments they receive, and enhancement of individual assets to enable a better chance for health and well-being, even when faced with substantial risk and adversity. (14) Windle cites A. Sacker in a personal communication giving examples of the layers of resources and assets that facilitate resilience, including individual development (temperament, aptitudes, biology, motivation, behaviour), family and household (cohesion, support, stability, finances, housing), neighbourhood and social context (work, social networks, services, transport, environment, schools) and social policies. (7) Recent research by Rossouw and Rossouw integrating health factors (exercise, nutrition, sleep) suggest that these are also predictive of resilience (Rossouw et al, 2016). The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing resilience through addressing aspects of individual development, family and household, social context, and health. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was administered to provide evidence of pre-program and post-program levels of resilience.

6.4.1 Individual Development

The program addressed two aspects of individual development: confidence and self-advocacy.

Confidence

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that most of the participants' confidence levels increased during the program. Participants rated themselves on how often they felt confident before the program⁹ and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). The average rating of confidence for the first cohort before the program was 1.6; at the end of the program, the average was 3.2. Values increased for all participants (target: 80%). In the second cohort, the average rating of confidence before the program was 2.7 and at the end of the program, it was 3.3. Values increased for three participants and remained at 'often' or 'always' for three others. School staff, program partners, and participants offered the following comments:

- I saw them becoming more confident over time.

⁹ Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants in the first cohort on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data was collected before the participants began the program.

- Some of them were the students who were wandering the hallways or staying in the shadows at school. ... Their self-confidence increased so much, they almost ran the school.
- It was great to see the girls at work together, not competing, to see how they made friends and became closer. They really have matured. They are now sure of themselves.
- She's engaged, confident, asks questions.
- She grew a lot, it was a great experience for her, jumping in and trying new things. She was happy and engaged and didn't want the program to end. Her confidence grew and she started asking questions in workshops.
- I feel like I've grown a bit more, I'm more confident. Learning skills like cooking and parenting gives you the support and information that you need and didn't get from regular school. I use it all at home, a lot of the skills.
- I'm more confident. If I need help, I know what's out there.
- I was shy and there were lots of people I didn't know in my class. With this group, I felt more confident to go into class.
- The program helped me to speak up. I recommend it to everyone.
- I'm more confident and comfortable being around people. I felt very comfortable in the program.
- I ... gained a lot of confidence. It was a good group of people for building confidence.
- Now I have more confidence. [The coordinator] was great and learning how to cook made me feel better.

Self-Advocacy

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that the participants' self-advocacy levels increased during the program. Participants were asked to rate themselves on how often they "advocate for what I need or want" before the program and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). For the first cohort, the average rating of self-advocacy before the program was 1.6. At the end of the program, the average was 3.2. Values increased for all participants (target: 80%). For the second cohort, the average rating of self-advocacy before the program was 2.3; at the end of the program, the average was 3.7. Values increased for five out of six participants and remained at 'always' for the sixth. School staff, program partners, and participants commented:

- At the beginning, she felt like she wasn't heard in the group, would wait for a turn to ask questions. Then she started to have the confidence to ask her questions.
- I saw big gains in self-advocacy and confidence and resilience.
- She's a very good self-advocate. When her child was born, she proactively settled all the custody arrangements.
- She doesn't believe in herself, but she will stand up for anyone else. She needs to learn self-advocacy, to ask for what she needs.
- She got better at dealing with her issues with [a government program] and proactively completed other steps.

- She is not strong at self-advocacy. She’s [dealing with a personal situation], so is standing up for what she needs sometimes.
- She came a long way in confidence and self-advocacy.
- I was not one to ask questions. Seeing everyone asking questions and talking about themselves, being open and not judgmental, helped a lot with my anxiety.

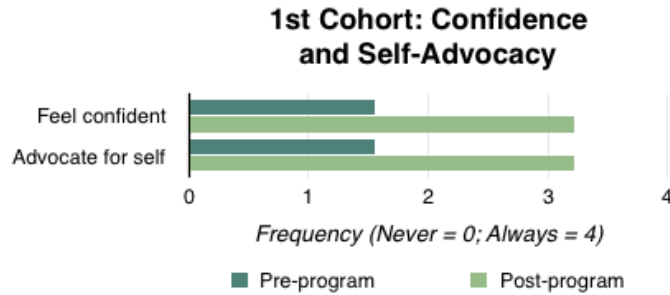


Figure 18: 1st Cohort Confidence and Self-Advocacy

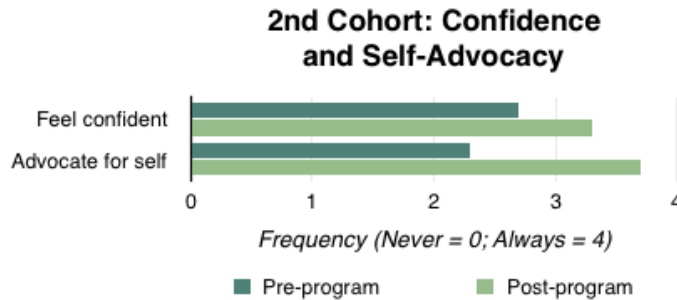


Figure 19: 2nd Cohort Confidence and Self-Advocacy

6.4.2 Family and Household

The program addressed a number of aspects of family and household, including food security, parenting, finances, relationships, and court support.

Food Security

Immediate food security was increased through culinary training, food supports at school, food/plants to take home, and connecting with community resources for immediate assistance, as discussed above in Section 6.2. Longer-term food security was addressed through education, training, and employment supports, as discussed in Section 6.3.

Parenting

The ‘Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting’ course was designed to increase parenting skills based on the principles of child development and effective parenting.

The facilitator noted, “I told them, ‘I’m a better parent every time I deliver this course. We can all use this as parents.’” The participants in the first cohort received a parenting certification from the course, which could support them if they were involved with the Children’s Aid Society or at court. For the second cohort, the issues with attendance prevented the participants from receiving a certification for this course; however, the facilitator indicated, “They were applying the ideas, especially some of the more concrete things. The next week, when we discussed it, they had examples of what they were able to do. This program is about a broader understanding of kids, it’s less skill-based, and they were getting it. I gave them the book, so they could work on it themselves.” All of the participants in both cohorts indicated that they were implementing the techniques they learned in the parenting course (target: 80%). Participants and the coordinator stated that their level of stress around parenting had decreased and the effectiveness of their parenting interactions had increased. Comments included:

- I could see the change in the mindset of the moms from week to week. In the first parenting sessions, I heard, ‘I’ve tried that – it doesn’t work.’ Over time their mindset changed, they tried the techniques, and I started to hear, ‘For the first time, my kid did this, or didn’t do that.’
- It was rewarding to see them get it. There is a lot of repetition in the program and they got the concept of the importance of developmental stages. ... When you’re working with the students you can see it’s clicking.
- I noticed over time that her questions about parenting were changing. She wasn’t having the same struggles.
- The positive discipline was new for her and she loved it.
- The parenting class really helped, looking at 0-7 years and how they cope. It taught us to think about how we would feel at that age to understand how our children feel. It gave us different ways to deal with our children, such as taking a breath.
- I liked the positive parenting and I’m using it at home. I’m calmer and I understand my child better. I understand the child’s brain and how it’s not fully developed.
- The parenting, positive discipline, helps to remember to be calm. They taught about understanding why your child’s upset. Maybe they need to talk, they need a hug. [My child] gets upset easily and then you get upset. [My child] starts to scream and cry. Now I can compromise with [my child].
- I have used some of the stuff from the parenting program. I’m not consistent but I’m trying.
- I do a lot of the stuff already for parenting, staying calm. I learned how to handle [my child] and keep [my child] calm.
- The parenting tips are really helpful. I get frustrated and I didn’t know ways to deal with it. It was difficult at home with [my child], but [my child] is really liking the new aspects of parenting that I learned. It’s easier to deal with tantrums.
- At home, I’m using the positive discipline. When [my child] isn’t listening, I put myself in [my child]’s position and think, “How is [my child] feeling?” Then we talk about it and spend a few minutes together before we move on to whatever we were doing.

- It helped a lot to look at things from [my child's] perspective.
- The parenting was helpful – I missed it quite a bit but when I was there it was very helpful. ... If I missed a day, [the coordinator] saved the information for me so at least I got that.
- I feel like I actually know what I'm doing with [my child].
- I loved the parenting, and I'm also doing something similar at [another agency]. It's helpful stuff.

In the follow-up with the first cohort, participants noted that they were still using the positive discipline with their children. One participant indicated that she was using the workbook as a reference for the teenage information as well, since her younger sister had come to live with her. Another stated that she was using some of the calming tools; however, she noted, "Not everybody's child works that way, especially if they have disabilities." Another participant indicated, "I learned quite a few new things in the parenting, even though I've done other [parenting] programs before. It was really helpful to learn about the child's developmental stages. ... The parenting was an eye-opener and it really helped. They explained everything and talked about different ways to handle situations." Another noted, "I'm listening to [my child] to understand why [my child] is upset. At school they use colour zones to indicate their emotions and [my child] uses it at home too to explain how [my child]'s feeling. Then I know to take a moment and be calm myself and listen to [my child]. I try to be more calm, understanding, put myself in [my child's] shoes, not get angry or frustrated, maybe give [my child] something else to focus on."

Finances

Sound management of the available resources and knowing how to avoid financial pitfalls make an important contribution to lowering stress and improving food security as well as housing security. The focus of the financial literacy sessions was on covering the key aspects needed to manage their finances and navigate potential pitfalls as well as on answering participant questions regarding financial matters. The sessions were delivered by two organizations. One of the program partners noted, "We talked a lot about self-advocacy and how to read between the lines. I talked about having an understanding that finances are constantly changing and we all need to ask questions. ... Most of us struggle with money at some time in our lives." The other program partner indicated, "It was a lot of life-skills talk. They had questions, and it was a cross-table dialogue with everyone participating." Both facilitators noted that more time would be needed to allow fuller discussions and cover basic finances in sufficient detail. One facilitator has a professional Facebook page where she posts advice, and a participant began following that page. Most participants in both cohorts stated that the discussion of budgeting was particularly helpful, although a few indicated that they were already adept at budgeting. All of the participants in both cohorts developed a household budget (target: 90%) and indicated that they were implementing the financial practices that were presented in the workshops or that they were already adept at financial management (target: 80%).

The CCRC conducted an evaluation of their financial literacy sessions in both delivery blocks. In the first block, participants indicated that they liked best: “learning about interest, credit (2 responses), budgeting (3 responses), work with money on payday, ask questions [as a consumer], financial evaluation.” Their feedback on “one idea I might try” was: “being careful with rent to own, checking my credit rating and score (2 responses), getting my credit rating better, not getting payday loans, getting a savings account, careful getting a credit card, budgeting, visiting the links provided to learn more, planning out what I have to pay every month.” These responses indicate an increased understanding of financial management and potential pitfalls. In the second block, CCRC did a more in-depth evaluation, with five completed pre- and post-session evaluations providing evidence of gains in financial skills and knowledge in 19 topic areas. The topics of largest increase in skills and knowledge overall were in goal-setting, investing, compound interest, credit card interest, ways to reduce debt, collection agencies, where to get advice on money management, and confidence in ability to manage money. One participant’s knowledge increased in every topic area, and most increased in almost every area.

Comments from the facilitator, the coordinator, and the participants included:

- It gives the moms a chance to talk to each other. It’s a window of opportunity, since in our society we don’t typically have those conversations [about finances]. It’s a chance to normalize talking about money with peers, talking about the issues, challenges, rewards.
- Budgeting and money management went over really well. They learned a lot and it was a big success. It’s the most important part. It doesn’t matter how little you have, you are in control, not in crisis mode. If you know there’s something big coming up, you can plan for it, get help, let someone you trust know. It was really well received.
- [A participant] liked the budgeting workshop. She had a plan and was putting money aside.
- [A participant] put together a really good budget, with all the categories she needed, with her bank statements. ... She wanted better financial skills and really liked the yearly calendar forecast.
- [A participant] is using the skills at home, doing long-term planning from the financial literacy sessions, talking to her [partner] about how they can manage extra income.
- [A participant] bought in to the financial literacy, talking about saving for the holidays, a monthly/weekly budget, and cost savings.
- [A participant] was engaged in the financial literacy – money, investments, etc. – with questions about how to make money go further and about RESPs.
- Financing class really helped with budgeting and how to save money. [The facilitator] let us sit and discuss the information – she was patient and interested in what we had to say.
- It helped to make a plan during financing class. I realized what I could afford. ... The budgeting class showed me how I can make smarter choices and put money aside each month for [my child].

- The financial information was helpful and is useful at home. I liked the envelope system.
- For budgeting, I already had some tricks, but I liked some of the ideas from the presenters and will try them.
- For the budgeting, I was good at that already. I learned how to do it at high school.
- The financial advice was a really good aspect and helped me think about budgeting for college.
- The financial information really motivated me. I'm bad with money and since my [partner] started working, we've been careless with money. I had issues with [a government program] and [the coordinator] helped me to sort it all out. ... I set up a whole budget with the back pay that I'm getting. We're going to move soon and so I budgeted for first and last month's rent. ... It's so important and if I didn't have that information, I wouldn't have been motivated to manage the money.
- The budgeting and financial workshops were one of the most important. It's something I need to learn. I made an appointment for a one-on-one session.
- The budgeting was really helpful, and I used it to plan a trip.
- The financial literacy was very interesting. I didn't realize how emotional it is [dealing with money]. Now I understand why I avoid it. ... I'm trying to budget better. It freaks me out. I need to see a specialist, so I need to book an appointment.

In the follow-up interviews with the first cohort, one of the participants indicated, "I budget better than before." Another stated, "Before I couldn't keep to a budget, but now I'm budgeting and putting money away." Another noted, "I'm happy with my life right now, with working and paying down my debts and looking at saving in the future. I just opened a savings account. I already paid off some debts that I had."

Healthy Relationships

The participants in both cohorts indicated that the session on healthy relationships was very helpful and appreciated learning about the resources available at KSAC (Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre). One participant noted that the discussion brought more clarity about what constituted an abusive relationship, and another indicated that the participants have experienced unhealthy relationships. In the first block, the facilitator stated, "The discussion was one of learning together – they are the experts in their own experience – and acknowledging their resilience, how strong they were. They created a welcoming, inclusive space, a non-judgmental space." The facilitator noted, "I was very moved by how they were so willing to share, the strength they exhibited." The coordinator stated, "The presentation from KSAC opened up some really important discussions." She indicated that the discussions gave an opportunity for sharing, with participants stating their perspective, "I wouldn't put up with that." In the second block, the facilitator noted, "It's an important aspect for young mothers to talk and learn about boundaries. We talked about how to safely negotiate boundaries and what their rights are, and gave them info about the centre." The coordinator indicated, "The healthy relationships discussion

was valuable for all of them. It helped them have that conversation, or for them to make that decision.” Some participants indicated that they made important changes in their relationships with partners as a result of these discussions. Other comments included:

- The sexual assault clinic presentation [on healthy relationships] was very helpful. ... People were asking questions and know what to look for and where to go to seek help. You need to feel comfortable. [The facilitator] was like a friend and she said we could ask for her specifically.
- She contributed a lot to the healthy relationships discussion. She’s over dealing with [inappropriate conduct], saying, “There’s the door.”
- We talked about relationships – what is healthy and what is not healthy. For [a former partner] who was interested in getting back together, she decided, “I don’t have to accept him back into my life.”

Court Support

Another aspect of support for family and household issues was with navigating the family court system. The Court Support group from the YWCA gave a presentation about their services and answered questions. The coordinator noted that the YW provides many other programs, including a walk-in clinic that connects women with a broad range of community services, and the YW facilitators indicated, “Anything they need, send them to us.” She stated that the participants asked detailed questions about their family court issues and realized that they can receive assistance with navigating the system. The facilitator noted, “In the first [block] session, a question initiated a big discussion of abuse, so we talked about what abuse is and some of the participants realized their relationships were abusive.” For both delivery blocks, the facilitator indicated, “We had a very good discussion, and they were very engaged.” In the second block, a question arose several weeks after the court support workshop, so the coordinator connected with the court support group again and relayed the information back to the participants. In the follow-up interviews, one participant stated, “It would be good to have them more often. It was very helpful. Being so young, it’s difficult for us to understand what’s going on in court, what to ask, what questions we should be thinking about.” Other participant comments included:

- The legal group were really great, amazing and forthcoming with information, wanting to help.
- I think the YWCA should come in to all of the classes. We learned a lot of information from them.
- The court support one was helpful. There was lots I didn’t know, and we had questions.
- The court program was good. If we needed to ask questions they were very helpful. I feel comfortable going to see them.
- I found out [specific information] that helped me from the court support people.

Housing

In the second delivery block, the coordinator added a workshop with Housing Access Peterborough to discuss rent-geared-to-income and affordable housing, a

recommendation that arose from the first block. HAP manages the wait list for Peterborough Housing Corporation and for other landlords who offer subsidized housing; the facilitator presented the housing options and the application process, and answered specific questions about eviction notices, whether to include their partner as a co-applicant, and landlord rights. Although only two participants were present for the workshop, the coordinator shared the information with the other participants. The facilitator noted, “They have a big need for more discussion on housing, especially since for many it’s their first time on their own.” Comments included:

- We talked about housing and she was interested in applying and asked about wait times. She was asking good questions.
- She wants to go to [college in a different city] and so when we were talking about Peterborough Housing, she applied to [housing in that city].

6.4.3 Social Context

Participants, school staff, and program partners concurred that one of the strengths of the program was in increasing the community of support available to the participants. This community of support involved the program coordinator, other participants, school staff, and community agencies, as presented in Section 6.1.1. In the first cohort, all participants reported coaching/mentoring from the coordinator regarding their personal/family life (target: 90%) and an increased sense of connection with each other (target: 90%), as well as increased knowledge of and connection to community agencies (target: 80%). In the second cohort, four out of six participants reported coaching/mentoring on personal/family life, with two noting that they didn’t require support in that area, and all reported an increased sense of connection with each other as well as increased knowledge of and connection to community agencies. This community of support aided in dealing with challenges. Facilitator, school staff, and participant comments included:

- [The coordinator] is providing great mentorship and a role model. She really related to them and was down to earth. They are comfortable with her and talked with her about their personal issues. Young moms need a good solid role model to let them know they are doing well.
- The most important parts of the program are building relationships and creating a supportive community, not feeling alone. Getting to know the services and agencies that are available locally, especially for crisis-type situations.
- The biggest impact I see is the community that is built within the group. It is such a powerful connection that the students build with the teacher as well as each other. Having such a small group is very beneficial because the students are able to feel safe and connected.
- Through all the programs, we met so many different people. Everyone has so much faith in you here, and they push you to do better things.

All of the participants in the first cohort indicated support for each other (target: 80%). In the second cohort, four out of six participants noted support for each other; the two who had not formed closer connections had the lowest attendance rates and were older

than the other participants, both of which may have been factors in the difference in their experience.

In the follow-up with the first cohort, most participants stated that they were still connected with the other participants, and all noted that they were now connected with others through work, education, or community groups. Four indicated accessing personal/family life-related community resources (target: 70% of participants accessing within six months of program completion).

6.4.4 Health

The research by Rossouw et al focused on the relationship of physiological health, including regular exercise, nutrition, and sleep, to resilience (2016). The evaluation has also included mental health in this category because of the well-recognized links between mental health and resilience (Friedli, 2009). The major health interventions of the program included food security, nutrition, mental health supports, and mindfulness and yoga sessions; in the second block, workshops on smoking cessation and on the Healthy Smiles Ontario program were also included. All participants in both cohorts stated that they were implementing the food security and wellness strategies that they had learned in the program (target: 80%) and the follow-up interviews indicated that participants continued to implement these strategies seven months after they completed the program.

Food Security and Nutrition

As discussed above, food security is essential to physical and mental health. In addition to increasing food security, the culinary training focused on nutrition in the sessions provided by the chef as well as those from Peterborough Public Health and Nourish. Participant comments included:

- It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food.
- I picked up cooking at home, and now I'm doing it from scratch instead of buying things. It's improved the quality of what we eat at home.
- The toddler nutrition was really good.
- I'm cooking healthier meals and I've used the recipes we learned at home.

Healthy Smiles Ontario

In the second delivery block, the coordinator added a workshop with the Healthy Smiles Ontario program, which provides preventive, routine, and emergency dental services for children and youth under 18 from low-income households. The facilitator noted that “it’s so important that they know about these programs as parents.” She indicated, “They had very good questions and were very engaged.” One participant commented, “I missed the Healthy Smiles talk, but I’m going to make an appointment for [my child].”

Smoking Cessation

Another workshop that was added in the second delivery block was on smoking cessation. The coordinator noted, “The smoking cessation was really great, but we only had one smoker this time [in the participant group]. I asked them if we should cancel and they said no, they all smoked in the past or have friends or family who smoke, so they wanted to know about quitting and tips and tricks.” The facilitator gave techniques for smoking cessation as well as nicotine replacement therapy. One participant commented, “She gave us great techniques and gave me patches. I smoked for [many] years and I quit through this program, so that’s a huge bonus for me.” At the time of the evaluation, the participant had maintained her cessation for two months. The coordinator indicated that a different participant “started smoking again towards the end of the program, so I shared the cessation information and techniques with her.”

Mental Health

A number of the participants indicated that they were dealing with mental health challenges. In both delivery blocks, three sessions were focused on mental health: the first was a discussion of the programs and services at the CMHA, the second was on Mental Health 101, and the final session was on stress management. The facilitator indicated, “They were able to talk about what was going on in their lives. They talked about mental health challenges and found out that others experienced them too, they were not alone. ... Some left with an idea of who they could call if they needed help: the crisis line, the CMHA.” She noted that the safe environment created in the program contributed to the effectiveness of the sessions, stating, “They were really open in talking about mental health issues. In our society we still have to break down that stigma and this was a safe space to do that.” Participants commented that it was very helpful to find out about the programs and services at the CMHA; the first block coordinator noted that the participants were very engaged in the Mental Health 101 discussion, and some were planning to follow up with specific programs or services. The second block coordinator indicated that a participant “was really into the mental health workshops and is supporting others.” The discussions allowed participants to share their experiences and to support each other.

Mindfulness and Yoga

One facilitator provided both the mindfulness and yoga sessions for both delivery blocks, with 10 sessions in total. The facilitator and the coordinator indicated that many of the participants in the first block had preconceptions about yoga that caused them not to be interested in participating in those sessions. In the second delivery block, the yoga sessions were called ‘Rest/Relaxation/Stretching’ sessions and all participated. The second block coordinator noted, “We told them at the end that it was yoga and they said, ‘Why was it not called yoga?’ Then one admitted that she would have been more resistant to it if it had been called yoga.” The facilitator indicated, “It worked well to not call the sessions yoga. That word scares people ... Keep calling it something that is helpful, that gets around the barrier of the word ‘yoga.’” All of the participants in both cohorts stated that the mindfulness sessions were very beneficial. As the program partner

noted, “It helps in working through past stuff – how can you work on budgeting when you’re having a panic attack, or thinking about a fight with your boyfriend?” She indicated, “They are carrying so much with them. We had a conversation that turned into a discussion of the abuse they had been through. Family of origin stuff kept coming up. This is heavy stuff they are dealing with.”

The facilitator used a varied approach and incorporated creative elements such as colouring. She noted, “I also did some things that they could do with their children, showing them how they could use the same techniques, but a 2-year-old version.” She indicated that both cohorts “were very open about all sorts of stuff. There was a real hunger for mindfulness and I gave them practical tools and ideas for how to incorporate it into their lives.” Participants indicated that the mindfulness techniques and breathing were very effective for them in reducing anxiety and stress. In the follow-up with the first cohort, all participants indicated that they were still using mindfulness, and one noted, “I have breathing techniques that I use for anxiety.” Another stated, “I use the wellness and the mindfulness with [my child]. [My child] really likes the yoga and it helps [my child] to be calm.” Other comments included:

- The material was very relevant, especially the mindfulness and yoga. I have social anxiety and the breathing techniques really helped and I learned other ways to cope.
- I liked the mindfulness and I use it at home. When I’m having a rough time, I know what to do. I got to learn about breathing.
- The mindfulness was really helpful, to help me deal with my child’s freak-outs, learning different ways to calm my child. I’m using it at home. It helps to deal with anxiety, especially the breathing techniques.
- I use mindfulness a lot. The mindfulness was really nice, to take that time for yourself, even if it’s 10 minutes of being calm. I’m using that outside of class.
- I am more calm, more aware of my mood, less anxiety.
- I use mindfulness a lot. I would like to do yoga with [my child] when [my child] is older.
- I make more time for myself. I learned that it’s important to make yourself feel better.
- I use the mindfulness sometimes to keep myself calm.
- The mindfulness and yoga give you a way to figure out how to deal with yourself.
- I use the mindfulness. I take a bath every night, and I need that bit of silence.
- I really looked forward to mindfulness, when we got to relax with nothing to do. The lady was really, really, nice and friendly. She gave lots of suggestions and tips for childbirth and she gave me activities for [my child]. I made a folder in my binder to keep it all together so that I can save it and use it at home. She had lots of ideas, “try this and try that, here’s this information,” all printed for me. She gave me exercises to do in pregnancy, stretches and activities to get ready for childbirth, and told me about birthing balls, and I got one.
- The mindfulness really helps. When [my child is] freaking out, I put [my child’s] stuffy on [my child’s] belly and [my child] watches it go up and down while [my child] breathes.

- The mindfulness was very relevant. It’s really awesome. I was already very involved with that. It’s very beneficial to the program.

Participants rated their knowledge and experience in parenting, healthy relationships, court support, mental health, mindfulness, and yoga before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.¹⁰ (Ratings for food security and nutrition are presented above in Section 6.2). The second cohort also rated their knowledge and experience in housing supports, smoking cessation, and the Healthy Smiles program. Values ranged from ‘No knowledge or experience’ (0) to ‘Very knowledgeable or experienced’ (3). The following charts display the average ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program for both cohorts. Interviews with the second cohort participants indicated that they had already participated in positive parenting and mindfulness through the SYM program or through programs at other agencies, which is reflected in their higher pre-program ratings for those areas.

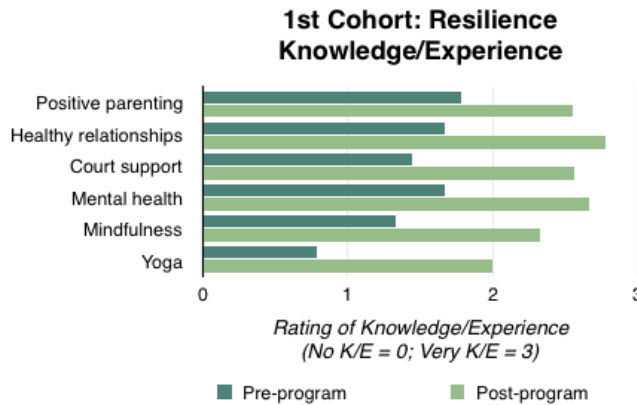


Figure 21: 1st Cohort Resilience Knowledge/Experience

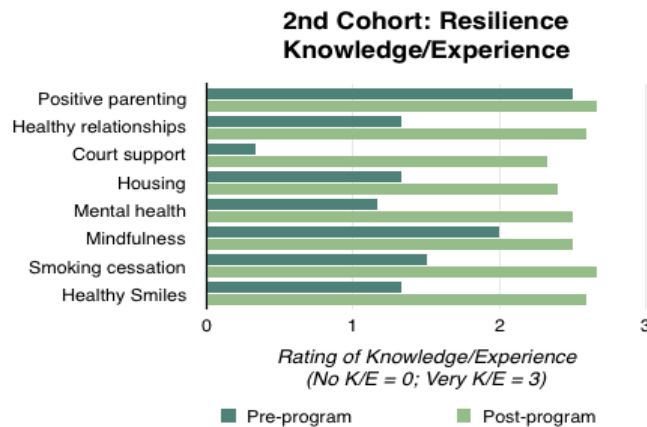


Figure 20: 2nd Cohort Resilience Knowledge/Experience

¹⁰ Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data was collected before the participants began the program.

6.4.5 Resilient Behaviours and Attitudes

Participants and school staff gave examples of resilient behaviours and attitudes in response to challenges. They also indicated that the program helped the participants to gain momentum in moving forward on their goals despite challenges. Examples of resilient behaviours and attitudes, as well as the momentum generated by participation in the program, included:

- The mindfulness and the parenting are helping me to face challenges in my life.
- [My child] has been in full-time daycare since January and I found that I wasn't doing something with my days. This program gave me a purpose and motivation. I feel like I've been doing something with my time.
- I think it has made a difference [in facing challenges]. I'm definitely more open to new things instead of closed off. I feel better about taking chances and I'm interested in new things.
- I'm more motivated than before, knowing I am getting this done and have all this help along the way. It's very encouraging.
- I'm good at facing challenges.
- I've been using some techniques to help me face challenges and they've helped. It's been a confidence boost to have the satisfaction of accomplishing something.
- I don't think I would have been able to [make a major life change] without the program.
- I liked talking to the people who came in to do presentations. I would never do that in a big class. I'm trying to get out of my comfort zone. I wouldn't have learned as much if I hadn't done that.
- I have more skills to deal with stuff now. With the mindfulness, I think about stuff more.
- I had a challenge recently, but it was easy to work through because of what I learned here.
- It's knowing about the little things and the confidence that builds, to know about the support services that can help with dealing with anything. I learned so much in 10 weeks.
- Some of the students are going to college. That would have never happened without the program. They needed help to get momentum.
- The girls [in the first cohort] are pushing each other to finish and graduate this year. They have created a wave of their own group who face the same challenges.

In the follow-up with the first cohort, one participant noted, "One thing that did come out of [my family issues] is that I know I want to leave things in better shape for my child."

6.4.6 CD-RISC Scale

The 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10) was administered to the participants at the end of the first delivery block and at the beginning and end of the second delivery block. The CD-RISC was one of three resilience scales to receive the best psychometric ratings in Windle, Bennett and Noyes' extensive methodological review of resilience measurement scales (Windle et al, 2011). Scores on the CD-RISC are

generally lower in those with psychiatric problems and those who are having difficulty coping with stress. However, scores are also generally lower in younger adults, such as students, and therefore results obtained with Canadian and US students are included in this report for comparison. No studies with single mothers were reported in the CD-RISC manual (Davidson et al, 2018).

For the CD-RISC-10, the total score ranges from 0-40. In the general US population, the mean score was 31.8, with a median score of 32 (SD = 5.4); lowest to highest quartiles were 0-29, 30-32, 33-36 and 37-40. A study with Canadian psychology students found a mean score of 28.0 and one with Canadian medical female and male students found a mean score of 28.8 among female medical students and 31.2 among male medical students. A mean of 27.2 was found with US college undergraduates and a mean of 30.1 was found with a normative US student sample. In Canadian primary care patients with depression, suicide attempts, or suicidality, mean scores were 22.3 for depressed patients compared with 31.0 for non-depressed patients. Subjects in a US student counseling clinic sample had a mean of 19.6, and those in a Canadian sample of patients with high anxiety had a mean of 24.7 compared to those without high anxiety at 31.4 (Davidson et al, 2018).

A mean score of 25.6 was obtained with the participants at the end of the first delivery block, with a median of 26. Individual scores ranged from 18-33. Most of the individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data gathered from interviews with participants and the coordinator. For the second cohort, the pre-program mean score was 25.2, with a median of 24. Individual scores ranged from 18-34. Post-program, the mean score was 32.3 and the median was 31.5, with individual scores from 26-40. Scores increased by 5-13 over the course of the program, and they increased for all participants. Individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data. The second cohort pre-program mean score was only slightly lower than the post-program mean score for the first cohort, which was consistent with lower pre- and post-program ratings of confidence and self-advocacy for the first cohort compared to the second cohort.

6.4.7 Summary

The program incorporated a number of elements designed to lower stress and increase the personal, household, and community resources available to participants to deal with challenging situations. For the personal/family life program component, all participants in both cohorts had met the short-term outcomes and most of the medium-term outcomes of the program. In the second cohort, several participants did not indicate receiving support from other participants. Qualitative data indicates an increase in resilience in the participants in both delivery blocks, which is supported by the increase in post-program CD-RISC scores for the second cohort. All participants in both cohorts, including those who had lower attendance rates, indicated that the techniques and strategies that they learned, as well as the support of the coordinators, other participants, and partner agency facilitators, gave them more resources to cope with challenges and more confidence in their ability to do so.

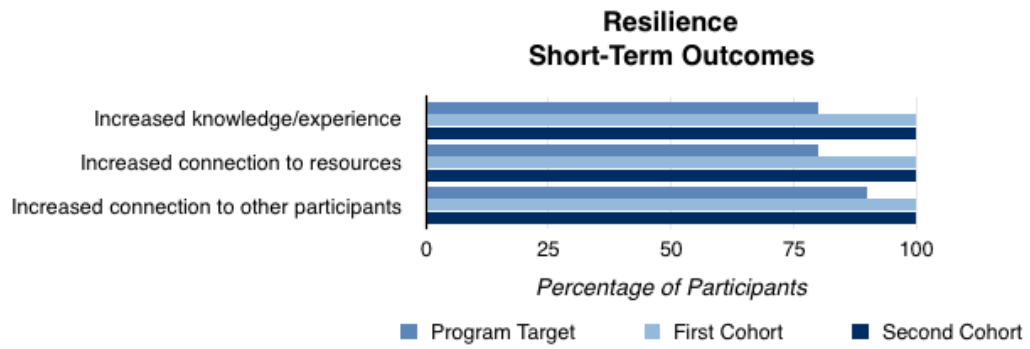


Figure 22: Resilience Short-Term Outcomes

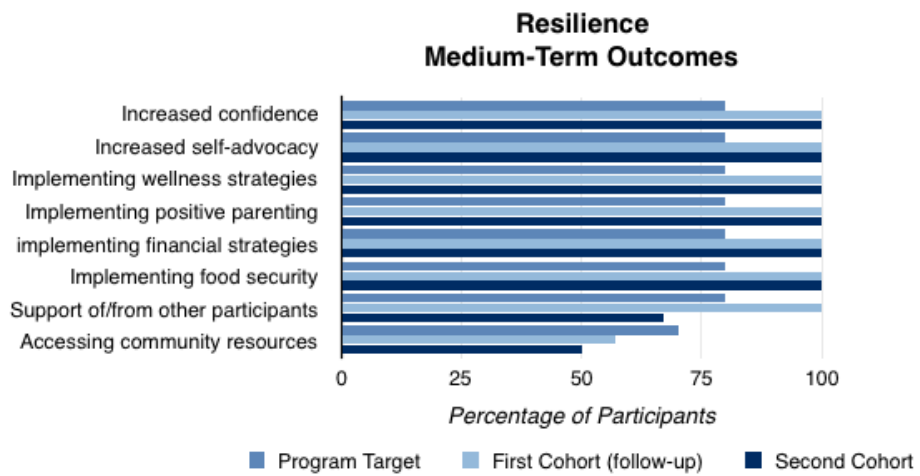


Figure 23: Resilience Medium-Term Outcomes

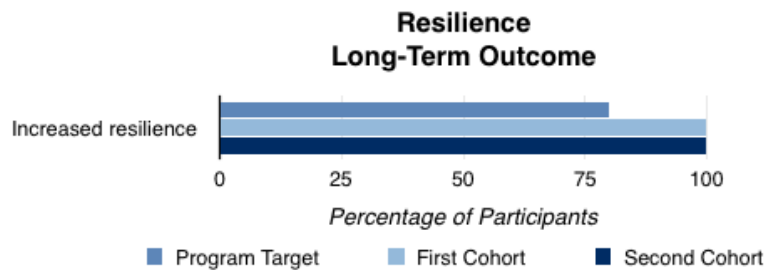


Figure 24: Resilience Long-Term Outcome

6.5 Positive Home Environment

Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) describes the neurobiology of toxic stress in childhood, its health consequences, and how toxic stress caused by ACES can alter DNA functioning and be passed from generation to generation (Stevens). This research indicates that the more ACES a person has, the greater their risk of chronic disease, mental illness, violence, and being a victim of violence. It also includes evidence-based practices that demonstrate how resilience-building practices can heal the effects of adverse childhood experiences. The resilience research indicates,

If the toxic stress stops and is replaced by practices that build resilience, the brain can slowly undo many of the stress-induced changes. There is well documented research on how individuals' brains and bodies become healthier through mindfulness practices, exercise, good nutrition, adequate sleep, and healthy social interactions. ... Evidence-based parenting practices ... increase the health of parents and children.

Many aspects of the home environment have been documented in the sections above on food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience. The cumulative effects of changes in these aspects of the home environment may assist participants in reducing toxic stress and building resilience in themselves and their children. All participants in both cohorts noted aspects of their home environment that were more positive because of their participation in the program (target: 80%), which was a long-term outcome for the personal/family life component of the program. In addition to the impact that a more positive home environment had on the participants, the program aimed to decrease the toxic stress experienced by their children. Comments by school staff, participants, and program partners included:

- The idea of the program is to break the generational cycle of poverty through food security and increasing employability skills. The program is designed to build wellness and build skills to enable them to make the step out of poverty.
- I'm a lot happier now because I'm doing something with my life. This gives me more life lessons.
- I see changes in myself. I'm happy. It's really cool.
- I'm happier since I started the program. My parenting has gotten better – everyone is in a better mood at home.
- I see changes in myself. My mood is so much better. I always have a good time in class and it's so positive.
- Things are really good at home. I'm using the positive discipline and it's made a huge difference.
- Increasing their confidence and self-esteem is huge. They have little kids looking up to them, and when mom is happy the kids are more secure.
- Working with the young moms educates the kids too, changing the trajectory of the whole family.

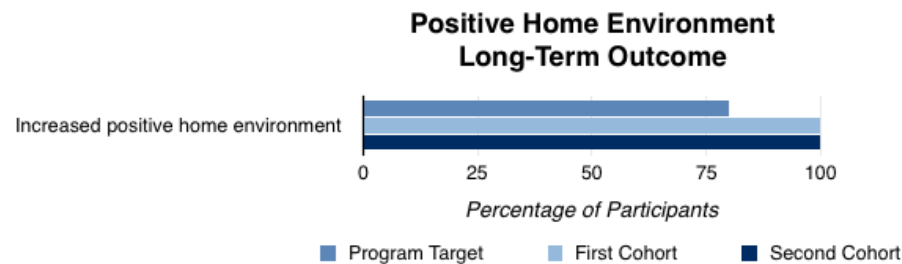


Figure 25: Positive Home Environment Long-Term Outcome

6.6 Overall Impacts

Participants, school staff, and program partners offered many comments on the overall impact of the program. A selection of these comments is included here. In the follow-up with the first cohort, several past participants indicated that they would like to do the program again, since they found it so helpful.

Participants:

- The best part about the program was to get credits, certificates, and bonding with other moms.
- I loved learning about what the community has to offer.
- We built up confidence in the group. [The coordinator] and the other teachers were giving us confidence, for example to go hand out resumes. [The coordinator] really helped with coping with everything, and yoga was really helpful for calming down. It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food. Everything has completely changed with the course.
- I think it is a VERY important program where single parents can support each other and feel confident in our own space. *(written response; emphasis in original)*
- When I was doing PLAR, I was on my own. This is all together, with just single parents. Before, I felt like a loser, I felt alone. I think this program is really important, really cool.
- I knew a lot of the girls before, all but one, we went to school together before. I feel a lot of us have grown, a lot have tried harder than what they did before. They showed up.
- Everything we've done I will use in the future. The budgeting, the positive parenting. Now I understand, "That's why my son is doing that." It also helped me to not be so negative about it myself. Now I call it "the terrific twos." I'm so much more positive about it. The mindfulness has helped, finding time for myself. That has really, really, really helped – to have a bath, turn off the electronics. Now I put the phone away an hour before bed and that helps me to sleep so well.
- I'm sad that it's ending. I hope other people do this. It helped me so much.

- I'm more engaged in things, more willing to do things and ask for help. It opened my eyes to a lot more opportunities in the community, now that there is a familiar face at the organizations. At home, I'm cooking now and that's made a big difference. I got more information about things to get through the day, things I needed to know.

First Cohort Follow-up:

- The cooking was really useful. I used to be afraid to use big knives and now I'm working in [food service]. It also opened my mind to different things, new recipes. The budgeting and the mindfulness were really useful too. Everything helped – I wouldn't drop anything. The certifications were good. I liked the program the way it was. I hope that they can keep it going. It helped me and it helped the others to take a step in the right direction. It gave me three credits, it was a fun program, and I got closer with the other girls.
- I definitely think it's a beneficial program. I hope it continues. ... It's all useful. I've used everything. It's very important that it's tied into the educational part, to help finish the diploma. It was a really good collection of resources and strategies.

School Staff:

- I learned so much from them. They are so resilient, full of life, with so much promise and strength. There is so much that they shared. I felt privileged, being able to sit in on the sessions and see them ask their questions, be vulnerable.
- It was intense, the most intense 10 weeks ever. I saw their journey from Day 1 – where they started and where they ended up – and saw their growth.
- I expected their challenges to limit them more than they did. They are very resilient girls. They kept pushing when I would not have expected them to. They are driven and really want to be good parents for their kids. There were unique supports that each girl needed to be successful.
- Now they see things they can do to get help, extra supports that are out there, but they need help with the ins and outs of the system – they feel young and little. They need to be in small groups with individualized instruction that can respond to their varying needs. Their needs are generally the same but different nuances, life experiences as triggers.
- The program really worked for her. The parenting assistance and resources were helpful for her. The financial and housing information was really beneficial, and the mindfulness and yoga. ... More than anyone else, the whole package impacted her and will continue to over time.
- I was glad to have her, glad she stayed and stuck it out. She saw the value in the program and was disappointed that she couldn't be there more. It was a huge success given where she was. ... The program was massively successful in helping her.
- Their self-confidence increased. A number of them applied to college. They wouldn't have had the confidence to apply without this program. They looked healthier, they were eating better, and they were more self-assured, with their heads higher. They were proud of their accomplishments. It was neat to see –

- they made a BBQ dinner for their families and they were proud of themselves. They worked as a team and each had their role. They pushed each other to do their best and you could definitely see the pride. They gained more trust in people – in [the chef] and [the coordinator] – they were letting other people in.
- Some have gone through addictions or abuse. For them to get through high school is a true accomplishment, with being so young, raising children themselves, and going through so much.
 - The students in the program are all struggling with trying to make things happen. This program was very confidence-building. They wouldn't have done it on their own. It was great to see how much they shone when they achieved their certifications. Some are so afraid of testing and they were ecstatic when they passed. They have a lot of responsibility in their lives and they live in poverty. They are all over 18 so you know that something interfered with obtaining their diploma. They probably have varying levels of support at home. Some live with their parents and some are on their own. Some have partners, but they don't have stability in their lives. This program gave them opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise.
 - There was a total change in these girls. It's the best program that I've seen in my 22 years. The results were just amazing. ... So many things changed for them and now we will see them graduate. These girls are on their own, and for them to learn all these skills and learn how to work as a group was so important. They had so many accomplishments through the program.
 - When the trustee stopped in, we talked about the program. I said, "We need this in every school." They are not the same girls as when they started. It's hard to believe the change.

Community Partners:

- This is a really important project for the board to pursue. It shows a commitment to diversity and equity. Although these students 'look just like white girls,' they are disadvantaged in palpable ways.
- My recommendation would be to do more of this program. I feel like the sooner we intervene, the more time that they have to enjoy the benefits of the changes they make. When we ask women who come to our shelter, "What advice would you give your younger self?" they say, "Get out sooner." They are also learning how to be good, supportive, non-judgmental friends.
- I saw a great improvement in them. It was opening their eyes that there is more than their small world.
- I see a tremendous value in this program. I wish all students in all communities had this. I hope they can continue to find funding for such an empowering program. This is how you make real change. There are health care system benefits, employment, retention – the foundation needs to be solid for all of that to happen.
- I think the value of this program is in helping them with every aspect of their lives – budgeting, food, other specific things, but also mindfulness and lifestyle. No matter what is arising for them – parenting, relationship issues – this helps them to manage what is arising in their life. The program gives them microtools that

- they can put into practice easily, and it's customized to their issues – health, self-esteem, guilt, anxiety, parenting. The value is in giving them enough tools to surpass the barriers that they face.
- I came to the dinner that they hosted at the end of the program. They helped to prepare the food and showed their knowledge of cooking and nutrition. It was good to see them sit with each other, chatting with their new friends. The program helps in reconnecting with high school. As a single parent, it's easy to get isolated; this program gives them a chance to be around other adults and make connections. That's important for mental health.
 - I think the value is in what they are getting that other high school students don't, the introduction to the social nets available in the community. Financial literacy, support networks, where can you go to get help, what's available to everyone. All high school students could benefit from that.
 - My advice to the program is to keep doing what you are doing. If you change one life a semester, that's incredible. It impacts not just them, but also their children.
 - I was out in the community and I saw [a participant] working at her new job. I feel the value is in them feeling empowered to go to school and follow their desires and interests.
 - These students are coming from behind, they didn't finish high school, they have a baby, they feel like their life is done. This gives them a sense of real achievement.
 - They develop a good support with each other, a support group. I'm glad they are able to incorporate life skills in with parenting, mindfulness, cooking – that is huge – allowing kids to get credits in other ways, accommodating other learning styles, offering different ways to finish high school.
 - They learn that they can do it – get their high school diploma and enter the workforce – it's feasible. They have a sturdy relationship with one another, which is so important, to have someone to talk to. They learned skills, certifications, smart serve, meditation, employment, what they could do in the future. They developed a network, which is hard even at PACE for single parents. This way they could relate to their peers in a safe space.
 - This was a really impressive group. They came up and thanked me at the dinner, introduced me to their young ones. They had an opportunity to grow through the program. It seemed there was a sense of maturity about them. They were appreciative of the program. They are the most mature young adults that I've talked to their age. The program had a real impact.
 - It teaches life skills that they haven't necessarily gotten already, helps with raising a healthy child, taking care of their bodies. There is such a large impact of caregiver mental health on children's development, and this program gave them different tools – mindfulness, parenting, mental health – it included very important aspects. They're also getting support, talking, sharing, with a place to go. They are really lovely women, and created a safe space, supportive.
 - The most important part of the program is in building confidence and their self-advocacy skills. They are very experienced and very skilled, so it's important to foster sharing. Food is easy to talk about, and then it starts conversations about other topics, peer-to-peer. Fundamentally they are learning skills but also about

the relationships around food and feeding their families. They may not have had that intergenerationally. They realize they can make that decision for their own children, their own parenting practices.

- This program helps them in realizing they need support and knowing where to get it. The program helps them with acceptance and self-compassion, and gives them important tools, like how to manage stress.
- It's valuable to get people together – seeing each other, talking, sharing daily struggles – “I do that too.” “I thought I was the only one.” They are also getting connected to the resources in the community ... it gives those programs visibility and connects the participants with people who want to help. It ties in with the research on resilience.
- The women have a sense of relationship with other women who are experiencing similar pieces. Talking about healthy relationships is an important piece. By giving them skills, the language to express themselves, yoga, breathing, improving their relationship with their child, these are all ways to build resilience.
- I feel it's a really necessary and fantastic program. Gaining self-esteem and confidence building, as well as skills. Talking to them about the critical childhood phase and how parenting impacts that and giving support to young parents in raising their children. Thinking about, “How do I want to parent my child?” Giving them space to learn about it. They were not necessarily planned and prepared for a child.
- I see the issues impacting these students every day. I'd like to see what their responses are, what they want to do next. The program fills a need and keeps the girls engaged. They need to have more than one kick at the can.
- They looked confident, spoke well about their situations. They advocated for themselves. They had learned different ways of talking to each other. They were lovely with each other, naturally providing the emotional support that is so necessary. They were pleased to be taken seriously as young women. ‘These people are listening to us and not treating us as the kids at the table.’ It's a moment of owning the space you're standing in.
- At the beginning, they said, “I'm never going to graduate this year.” By the end, [two were] accepted to college. I was worried that nine participants [in the first block] were not enough to make a big impact, but when you see the change in their lives, the individual impacts, it made me say, “How can we make this broadly available?” They are not only finishing high school but taking their next steps.

7 PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

The following suggestions for potential program modifications were offered by participants, program staff, and program partners. These suggestions have been recorded here for program management to consider, given the constraints of time and resources for program implementation.

7.1 Program Name

The ‘Single Parent Project’ name was a legacy from an earlier funding source. However, the program accepted participants who had partners as well as those who did not. Since the name does not accurately represent the characteristics of the potential participants in the program, it creates a barrier to recruitment. Although the posters and website contained the statement, ‘Ask us if you wonder if this could be you,’ the second block coordinator noted, “It’s a challenge in recruiting when people assume they can’t come, so they never contact me.” She also indicated, “Custody is not an issue for [acceptance into] the program, but it’s still a barrier if people assume it is.” The coordinator suggested that the name could be changed to the Female Parent Program. Program partners concurred that it would be beneficial to change the name of the program to represent the target audience.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that program management select a name for the program that reflects its target audience.

7.2 Recruiting

In both delivery blocks participants were already registered at PACE, although some stated that they were not attending on a regular basis and were drawn back into the school through the program. One participant in each delivery block was referred to the program by a community agency. The teachers from the School for Young Moms and the PLAR program have been instrumental in referring their students, and the principal and vice-principal have also suggested potential participants. The second block coordinator indicated that it would be valuable for other teachers at PACE to see the program in action to raise awareness within the school.

Word of mouth was a very effective recruiting tool in the first delivery block. The program may wish to consider this as a formal part of the recruitment process in the future, by inviting former participants to talk about the program in classes, using quotations from the participants in promotional materials, and contacting former participants to notify them of the program dates and ask them to spread the word to those who might be interested. One community partner indicated,

It would be great to have these girls come back and talk to the next group, tell the new students, ‘I was exactly in your position. I didn’t think I would graduate.’ They could also visit the School for Young Moms to let them know about this program as the next step, and why they should be part of it. The message at the School for Young Moms could be, ‘Next month you can go here,’ when they or their child are aging out of the School for Young Moms program. It could be part of the regular pathway.

The vice-principal noted, “The ideal would be to have this program completely integrated into the school, so that when the students age out of the School for Young Moms, they could access this program to help finish their credits. Other students could be part of the program too.”

All of the agencies who were involved in program delivery in both delivery blocks were willing to assist with recruitment and indicated that being contacted a month or two before the program starts would give time to identify and refer potential participants for the second delivery block. One partner agency commented, “People need to hear about it, think about it, so it’s important to promote and recruit soon enough.” Another indicated, “It would be good to know at least a month in advance so that it can be shared with frontline staff and there is time to refer clients.” Interviewees suggested other agencies who could refer potential participants, including the Peterborough Child and Family Centres, Social Services, the Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre, PARN (Peterborough Aids Resource Network), the Children’s Aid Society, Ontario Works, the Salvation Army, Five Counties, and the Partners in Pregnancy Clinic. In addition, participants indicated that posters could be displayed at the Ontario Works offices, Peterborough Square, children’s clothing stores, doctors’ offices, the courthouse, food banks, shelters, and the bus terminal. The second block coordinator also noted, “We could also use social media, maybe Facebook, tweets, posts in groups for single moms.” A partner agreed, indicating, “The posters are great, but not designed for social media. It would be good to have something ready to go for social media, and perhaps have a Facebook page for the program that could be shared.”

The first block coordinator noted that the value of the program should be shared with school staff, potential participants, and partner agencies, including the opportunity to earn three credits and certifications as well as the graduation rate. As she pointed out, “Even the participant who had been involved in the earlier two programs was attracted by a new certification in First Aid.” The second block coordinator concurred, indicating that the certifications, culinary, positive discipline, mindfulness, learning new things, and connections with community agencies were the most influential in persuading potential participants to join the program. The opportunity to earn credits was important to both cohorts, with a number of students stating that they would not have participated if they had not been able to earn credits. Participants also cited gaining experience and getting to know other mothers as good messages for recruitment. One partner also suggested that program messages “focus on how it makes the participants feel rather than only on what they learn. People will buy in if they hear about how the participants feel empowered, heard, connected . . . It’s so much more than a little bit of parenting skills, a bit of cooking – they feel heard and supported wherever they’re at.” Inviting the media to observe the program and promoting ‘success stories’ from program participants and graduates would also be effective means of raising awareness of the program in the community.

To overcome the barrier that childcare poses to participation in the program, more lead time in recruitment (two months or more) may be required to allow those who do not currently have childcare to find a space. Although this would not guarantee that potential participants would find childcare spaces, it would give more opportunity for them to explore options and be placed on wait lists. Program participants suggested that some of the employment and childcare barriers might be reduced if students could have the option of participating part-time, allowing them to attend around their work schedule or childcare availability by committing, for example, to three or four days a week. While

this might increase the number of participants, it may create complications for program delivery.

In the second block, the coordinator and partners indicated that the most effective way to assist the partners in recruiting would be to visit the key agencies, including those that are not involved in delivering workshops, and meet with the staff there to describe the program and answer questions, rather than sending an email about the program. One partner commented, “A lot of youth we see know they need their OSSD but it’s so hard [for them] to figure out how to get it in.” Program partners also suggested that the SPP could assist in recruiting participants for the Homeward Bound program, which offers tuition for college as well as up to four years of housing, childcare, and other supports such as assistance in finding employment, providing the possibility of a next step for interested participants. The first block coordinator indicated that she recommended the Homeward Bound program to participants who fit the criteria.

In summary, an effective promotion and recruitment strategy could include identifying a consistent staff person who is responsible for promoting the program, liaising with partner agencies, and following up with potential participants. This staff person would also initiate recruitment through early and repeated communication with agencies (e.g., two months before program start, and again at six weeks before and one month before), and through presentations at key agencies who have direct contact with the target audience, including those who are not providing workshops in the program. Communication tools could include a brief summary sheet for agencies and school staff with key information about the program content, benefits and eligibility, as well as a poster, a website and/or Facebook page, posts on social media, and a press release including the key information and testimonials. Past participants could be involved in a media event and in identifying potential participants.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that program management develop a promotion and recruitment strategy.

7.3 Scheduling

The first program delivery block was planned to occur earlier in the semester but was delayed due to staffing issues. Program participants and school staff concurred that the program should be offered earlier (suggested times were January-March or February-April) to give more time to finish other credits after the program ends. The guidance counsellor noted that finishing at the end of June caused issues in meeting deadlines for college and OSAP applications. The guidance counsellor worked with Fleming College to extend the deadline for applications, but indicated, “It might not be so easy if they were applying to other colleges or universities. It would take the stress off to have more time to complete all the steps.” Several program partners noted that spring was better timing for them than the fall, and that it was “motivating for the participants to be part of graduation.”

As discussed above, three weeks of program planning and preparation was a tight schedule for the coordinator. Program partners whose sessions began in the first week also indicated that it would have been helpful to have more time for preparation. One program partner noted that “by the time we were contacted for session times, we didn’t have much availability,” indicating that the program would ideally contact partners several months ahead to ensure that all of the sessions could run as planned.

The first block coordinator indicated that the daily schedule could be changed to be more reflective of PACE’s schedule, lessening disruptions by allowing the students to take breaks with the rest of the student body and not having the bell interrupting the sessions. Another possibility would be to start earlier (e.g., 9:30) to take advantage of the morning when participants were most engaged. Participants in the second block suggested having a designated break time (for example, 11:45-12:10) to provide consistency, although they noted that flexibility in break time on culinary days was understandable. Program partners noted that if morning sessions ran late, the participants received a shorter break. A program partner stated, “I think it’s important to make sure we don’t overwhelm them each day ... They’ve done a lot before arriving at school and if they’re going to be ready to absorb all this information, they need to have time to eat, take a break.”

The second block coordinator indicated that having three PA days and a holiday resulted in less ‘program days’ and therefore less flexibility in scheduling. She noted that extra days could be added at the end to compensate for any PA days and holidays that fall into the program period, making it a ‘50-day program.’ Some participants were in favour of having a longer program, up to a full semester. School staff indicated that a longer program could interfere with obtaining other credits and might not give the same ‘intense’ experience that created the close bonds between participants and the sense of momentum that was a feature of the ten-week program. It would also require additional resources.

Several partner agencies in both blocks noted that it would be helpful to receive a schedule of all of the workshops, allowing them to plan how they can complement what is being offered by others.

7.4 Number of Participants

The grant proposal indicated that the target for the number of participants per delivery block was 20. However, in the first delivery block, the maximum number of participants at one time was 10 (of the eleven participants in total, one participant left the program after her first day, before the final three participants joined). In the second block, the maximum number of participants registered in the program at one time was seven; however, one participant left the program after attending 1.6 days, and challenges in attendance resulted in many days with three or fewer participants present. In the first delivery block, the coordinator, the chef, and the participants felt that 10 participants was ideal. Other school staff concurred, noting, “Although we said this time, ‘We only have 10,’ it is kind of the magic number.” Larger numbers “would change the group dynamic. It may have more disadvantages than advantages to increase the group size [beyond

10]. It would be more demanding for the chef and the coordinator, and cost more.” In the second delivery block, the coordinator, chef, and partner agencies were in favour of 10 participants as the ideal number, while the participants felt that 5-8 people was ideal, which was reflective of the smaller number of participants in their delivery block.

The first block coordinator indicated that the maximum number of participants that one coordinator could support would be 15, while still providing the level of one-on-one support required to create a strong bond and assist the participants in completing the program. She also felt that having more than 15 participants would lead to small groups forming within the main group, and that “they wouldn’t have an opportunity to speak and have their voice heard. There were a lot of different perspectives and that is hugely important.” The minimum number that she recommended was 5-7 participants. She noted, “There need to be enough participants for people to know that they aren’t alone in feeling or thinking the way they do.” The second block coordinator felt that 8-10 participants was the maximum number that could be effectively supported, “otherwise you’re not getting to know them as well and they don’t come to you with things, you don’t find out about stuff and offer to help, have conversations at the end of the day It’s not always them asking for help.” She noted that the minimum number of participants to run the program would be four, although even on the days with only one or two participants, “It still worked ... the ones who were here got a ton of value.” Participants in the first cohort indicated that the smallest group size would be 5-8 people and the largest no more than twelve. In the second cohort, the participants felt that the smallest group would be 2-4 participants and the largest would be eight. They noted that a smaller number of participants allowed everyone to ask questions and to receive help from the coordinator and the chef.

Interviewees concurred that the maximum number of participants that could be accommodated in the kitchen facilities at one time was about ten. The chef noted, “With 10 people, it’s pretty busy in the kitchen, and they are on top of one another.” He indicated that 8-10 was a good group size, unless the culinary sessions were held in the teaching kitchen at PPH or at the Mount, where groups of 15 could be accommodated. Several program partners noted that having a small group in the second block made it more difficult to justify their involvement, especially with some sessions only having one or two attendees, although they indicated that they were willing to participate again in the future. One program partner would have preferred that their workshop be rescheduled because most participants were absent that day. Program partners also stated that some of the workshops are more effective with at least five participants present, to facilitate discussion.

Some interviewees proposed that the program could have two sessions running concurrently in order to accommodate 20 participants. In this format, half of the group would participate in a culinary session and the other half in a workshop and then the groups would switch activities. The groups could alternate in a morning/afternoon format or have two full-day culinary sessions per week with alternating days for workshops. The first block coordinator indicated that some of the certifications could be done together as a large group. However, she noted, “It would be very difficult to only

have half the group at a time. It wouldn't give the same results, the same conversations." She also indicated that more coordination time and program budget would be required if the participant numbers doubled and the sessions were being offered twice.

7.5 Program Participants

Suggestions were made about expanding the eligibility for the program to under-18s, pregnant women, male parents, and those who do not have custody or are not parents.

Under-18s

The requirement for participants to be over 18 was a legacy from the previous funder. School staff noted that this creates a gap in programming for young mothers who are under 18 but whose child is over one year old and thus no longer eligible for the School for Young Moms program. The first block coordinator indicated, "This program is of value to anyone who has kids. For under-18s, some of the conversations may not reflect their world. They may not be at the same place, but it could be motivational to hear from the older students." The second block coordinator noted, "It wouldn't be a big deal to include under-18s, to stretch the age group, although they might have more trouble bonding as a group.... As long as they aren't the majority of the group, I think they would step up to the level of maturity of the group." Other school staff indicated that the over-18 requirement also simplified program administration, since there was no need for permission forms and other legalities. Some under-18s live independently and would not require parental permission.

Male Parents

Some of the participants felt strongly that it would be a valuable program for male parents as well, and some school staff and program partners concurred. One agency noted that they receive calls from male parents who have been ordered by court to do a parenting course, indicating, "There's a gap, with not much for dads." Opinions were divided as to whether the program could be run as a co-ed program. The interviewees who were in favour of a co-ed approach stated that there would need to be separate sessions for some parts of the program, such as healthy relationships, to allow for full discussions. However, most interviewees were in favour of separate programs, either alternating between male and female cohorts, with a session offered yearly for each, or having two groups running simultaneously and doing some workshops together, such as the certifications. One partner stated, "Dads need each other for support. In our prenatal classes, the moms and dads split up, and in the evaluations the dads say that they really appreciate talking to other dads, and that they learned so much." Many concurred that, while there is a need for a male program, the format and content might be different and recruitment might be difficult.

Some participants also suggested that partners could be involved for certain sessions, although other participants disagreed, indicating that this format would not work out well for those without partners. Some interviewees felt that there could be a young couples' program, while others indicated that having couples in the program would cause issues

with dynamics. The first block coordinator stated, “At times I wished there were a male perspective. ... With all girls, they could talk more freely. They succeeded at having a ‘judgment-free group.’ Some have issues with trusting males.”

The first block coordinator stated that the teacher could be male or female; she indicated that she would feel comfortable facilitating a male group and she has male colleagues who could facilitate both groups as well. Other interviewees thought that the teacher should be the same gender as the group, to create a role model and a welcoming space for deeper discussions.

Comments included:

- I think that young dads need the exact same course. So many dads have responsibilities with children but don't have the support and the training.
- There is nothing for fathers. I know some single dads who aren't going to school because it's so hard. Here they would get to learn about parenting and raising kids. It's hard for them to go and ask for help. It's intimidating. There are so many young men here at the school who could use this course.
- If there is a way to incorporate [men] that would be great. When it's just women, there are aspects that people will feel freer to talk about, but there are single fathers. It might be a challenge to incorporate them. The program should continue, and maybe there should be a male program too. If you try combining the genders, people aren't as comfortable. I have shared access with my former partner, so a program like this would help him.
- The program should be for men too. It's the Single Parent Program. It could be fathers and mothers together – we are all single parents and we all need the same advice. It could be together or separate, a program for single dads. Fathers should be included. They need to learn what we're learning. ... It would help them to bond with their kids and have a support group.
- It could add on co-parenting, talking about how it's important to be able to be in the same room, to put aside your feelings and learn how to focus on the needs and rights of the child.
- We need a single dad project too. They could use it as well. It could be the same curriculum, with parenting, foods, etc. It wouldn't work as a co-ed program. The bonds that they formed wouldn't have happened. We have dads here who are single parents and some who only see their kids every couple of weeks. That makes it easy to give in to the kids, but this way they would get a better appreciation for the problems that can cause. It would help them with co-parenting.
- The program should be available for young men too. ... It's an important message, especially in today's society, that the responsibility for parenting is not only on the mothers. The dads need help as well.
- There's a huge need for the dads. ... Even if they don't have custody, the kids need dads in their lives. If they have involvement with the child, they need to learn about parenting. ... People parent the way they learned from their own parents, but if they see other effective ways, they can try it and see the results.

- I've done young mom programs before. I wonder where the young men are. It would be helpful to bring in that support. If they are both able to support the children, then the woman isn't responsible for everything.

Parents without Custody

One of the participants in the first cohort did not have custody of her child. The coordinator stated, "I had to argue to get her into the program, because she didn't have custody of her child. Now she is a major success story of the program." Another interviewee indicated, "[The program] has value for people who want to be present in their child's life, whether or not they have custody." As well, the parenting workshops that the participants received as part of the program could support them in their arrangements with the Children's Aid Society or in court.

Pregnant Women

Opinions were divided about including pregnant women in the program. Some felt that they did not yet have the experience of parenting and would not be able to fully participate in some aspects of the program. Others thought that pregnant women over 24 would benefit from the program and should be included (those up to 24 qualify for the School for Young Moms).

Non-Parents

Although some students who would like to work with children but were not parents expressed interest in joining the program, the first block coordinator felt that much of the bonding that occurred in the program was due to the shared experience of pregnancy, birthing, breastfeeding, and parenting.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that program management examine the options for broadening the target audience for the program, decide on eligibility for future delivery blocks, clarify the promotional materials if necessary, and communicate the decision to program partners.

7.6 Program Content

Program participants, school staff, and partner agencies indicated a number of suggestions for modifications to the program content.

Culinary Training

Participants in the first delivery block indicated that they would have liked more time for culinary training, although the coordinator noted, "One week they had 3½ days in the kitchen and it was too much. They were burnt out." Other program partners in the first delivery block also provided culinary training. The participants found it confusing to

work with different styles of kitchen management and techniques than that of the chef who led the ongoing culinary training. A possibility would be to prepare the program participants before the other culinary training by indicating that different chefs manage the kitchen in different ways and presenting it as an opportunity to broaden their experience, as they would be expected to adapt to the kitchen management style of the chef in a culinary workplace.

Nutrition

Several participants noted that they would have liked more information about healthy eating. The chef indicated, “I’d like to build more about that into the cookbook, more about costing and nutrition, maybe in a reference section. What is a balanced diet? It would be worthwhile to do a bit less cooking [in the program], fewer recipes, and put more emphasis on that information – nutrition, cost.” The PPH facilitator indicated that it would be preferable to have a series of half-day workshops on nutrition, and to do a needs assessment with the participants at the outset to ensure that the workshops are responding to their needs. She also stated, “If we have more time, there’s the opportunity to do a mix of presentation and hands-on.”

Culinary Field Trips

The field trip to Toronto to see George Brown College and the St. Lawrence Market in the first delivery block was a program highlight for everyone who participated; the participant who had been in the program in the previous two years noted that this experience was the best out of all three years. Participants in both delivery blocks also indicated that they enjoyed their trip to the Peterborough Downtown Farmer’s Market. The first block coordinator noted that field trips to local restaurants with different types of kitchens would be very interesting, so that the participants could see the kitchens in action and have a better understanding of what types of jobs are available. Another opportunity would be to participate in a gleaning trip, to introduce the participants to this community food support resource.

Food Bank

The second block coordinator had planned a workshop on the Food Bank, but it was cancelled due to staff changes. Participants identified it as a good workshop to include in the future.

Gardening

The coordinator noted that there is an opportunity to include more about gardening as another method of connecting with healthy food. The participants in the first delivery block received plants and some were excited to plant them at home. Participants were also interested in the community gardens.

Adult Training Network

The Adult Training Network has other training sessions that would be beneficial for participants, especially the soft skills training, which would offer them the opportunity to gain other important skills and more certifications. The second block coordinator indicated that she had explored including the Customer Service/Point of Sale training as well as the Soft Skills training, but was not able to fit them into the schedule.

Careers

The first block coordinator indicated that she had many discussions with participants about their career plans; some knew the career that they were interested in pursuing, and for others it was a conversation about what they enjoy and how that could become a career path. She noted that it would be helpful to spend more time on the next steps. The second block coordinator indicated that it could be useful to have previous participants come in to talk about what they have done since the program or have a presentation from female single parents who were in a similar position and are now launched on their career path. A participant noted that there were helpful discussions with some facilitators regarding certain types of careers and indicated, “For those who have three or four ideas, it would be good to talk about skill building and job fit. When you have a child, it’s daunting. How do you pick a career and juggle children at the same time?”

The EPC facilitator stated, “It might be good to have us back sometime in the last couple of weeks, to talk about youth and employment.” She indicated that it is helpful for participants to have a “smooth referral process for their next steps – continuing school, employment agencies. ... There needs to be an individual who follows up with them and maintains contact over the transition period, maybe a few weeks.” This could become part of the coordinator’s duties in the two weeks following program delivery. A partner suggested that the program could consider talking to participants about working in the trades so that they have opportunities for employment when they finish school. Another suggested that the program could use PACE’s woodworking shop to “give them confidence in working with tools, give them a taste of doing things for themselves ... give them a taste into that door of trades. They could include a small woodworking project, like making a stool for children to access the sink.”

Post-Secondary Education

The second block coordinator noted that the guidance counsellor could do a presentation on applying to post-secondary education, including sources of funding. A facilitator suggested that closer ties could be developed with Trent and Fleming “to create an easier track to post-secondary for these students. For example, someone from Fleming could come to speak, or the students could go to campus. That would solidify the implicit next step for them.” The students could tour the trades building at Fleming and see for themselves that there are women in those programs. A participant also suggested that it could be helpful to discuss the differences between OSAP and OW.

Mentoring

Both coordinators connected with Aspire regarding its mentoring program, but indicated that more lead time was needed in scheduling. Ideally, Aspire would be involved early in the delivery block to allow time for matching. In addition to providing support for the participants, mentors could help them make other connections in the community. A program partner also mentioned that having mentors to help them stay in university and college would be helpful, noting, “It’s difficult when you’re the first one in your family to navigate that.” She suggested that the Soroptimists might be interested in mentoring. Another suggestion was to invite program graduates to mentor the next groups, “to help build a bridge for those who follow them.”

Modeling Soft Skills

A program partner noted, “It’s important to explicitly teach them how to talk with authorities like school, court, to achieve what they want, to negotiate. They may not have had that modeling in their lives.” This could be achieved by having them watch while the teacher makes calls on their behalf or by practicing the type of interaction that could occur with the financial aid office or a child’s school. She noted, “These are skills that middle-class people take for granted, but it may not be the environment they grew up in. This offers an opportunity to step into that role for the kids who never had that, help them in navigating the system, taking those skills to the next level. By teaching them both the academic and the social skills, it will apply to their whole lives.”

Court Support

Participants and the coordinator agreed that more time with the Court Support team would be beneficial. The Court Support facilitator proposed that a court support worker could come in to the program several times to meet with participants in the classroom and help them stabilize their situations. The coordinator also indicated that one-on-one time for participants to receive answers to their personal questions would be beneficial.

Financial Literacy

Both of the financial literacy facilitators indicated that they would like to have more time with the participants in order to answer their questions and allow for more discussion of finances. The coordinators concurred, and participants in both cohorts supported more financial literacy sessions and noted that the budgeting sessions were very useful. The facilitator from the CCRC noted, “With moms that age, they need time to express their experience. Maybe keep the content to 1.5 hours but have 2-3 hours to cover it, lots of time for conversation.” She indicated that it would be helpful to know more about them ahead of time, such as their financial challenges. A session on vision boards and planning could be scheduled near the end of the program, as participants are thinking about their next steps.

Healthy Relationships

The facilitator in the first delivery block suggested that KSAC could do one session on their services and another session on healthy relationships, to have more time to explore the topic. She also noted that she would bring a co-facilitator from the clinical counselling team in the future, to be able to offer in-depth answers to questions and deal with any activation of painful memories. She stated, “This topic will generate heavier conversations, so it would be better to make sure it’s scheduled partway through, not in the initial days of the program, so that they have time to create that safe space first. We can come in later once the relationships have formed.” The suggestion of having two sessions was implemented in the second delivery block.

Another program partner suggested that KSAC could show the Resilience film about adverse childhood experiences (ACES) research to help the participants understand the effects of trauma. She noted, “When you are focused on survival, longer-term planning isn’t possible. When our clients say they won’t do something that seems beneficial, I look for the ‘hidden can’t’ – the real reason behind their refusal. Everyone wants to be in a better position, but if you have a barrier that you believe you can’t overcome, you’ll just say you won’t do it.”

Housing

A need identified in both delivery blocks was information about accessing subsidized housing. In the second delivery block, this was addressed; however, the facilitator indicated that there was also a need for information about their rights and responsibilities as tenants, as well as information from the Housing Resource Centre at CCRC about certain subsidies that are available, such as emergency funding or arrears arrangements for Peterborough Utilities. The CCRC facilitator noted that the Housing Resource Centre could also provide information about the importance of keeping receipts, and what to do if they are in a bad situation or have a bad co-tenant. They can also address how to estimate the true costs of a rental to pre-empt people having to move. The Housing Access Peterborough facilitator indicated that questions arose about whether to include their partner as a co-applicant and noted, “Maybe it would be better to do the housing information nearer the end, once they’ve already talked about healthy relationships, so that they are ready for those discussions.”

Children’s Aid Society

The YWCA facilitator from the first delivery block has a contact at the CAS who is “very successful at creating rapport and assisting parents and children.” She noted, “The threat of CAS involvement is very real in their lives, and [the CAS contact] can have that frank discussion with them about what they’ve experienced. They will recognize her as a person who understands their situation.” The second block coordinator and participants concurred that the program should include a workshop from CAS about their services.

Giving Back

The first block coordinator indicated that she would have liked to have a project in which the participants were giving back to the community. One possibility would be to volunteer together to prepare a meal for the One Roof Community Diner, which provides daily meals for those affected by food insecurity, putting their culinary skills to work and doing something for others. One Roof is also a place where the participants could volunteer to gain more food service experience. Regarding this plan, the chef indicated, “The idea of preparing a meal at One Roof [Community Diner] was a great one. It would have given them a feeling of accomplishment to prepare a meal for that many people. Knowing that they cooked a meal for 150 people would be a valuable sense of contribution.” Unfortunately, the planned collaboration with One Roof in the second block was not possible within the timeframe of the program; the coordinator indicated that in the future, this opportunity would need to be scheduled as far in advance as possible.

Other Programs

The CCRC facilitator indicated that they have a number of other programs and supports that could be of interest to the participants, including clinical counsellors who could talk about self-care and stress. CCRC also has a women’s group called ‘Choices and Changes’ about choosing healthy relationships with friends, family members, and partners. They talk about all kinds of abuse, not just physical: financial abuse, verbal, bullying in relationships. As well, the second block coordinator noted that presentations about the Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) program, Partners in Pregnancy, and the Early Years centres would be useful.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that program management review the suggestions for program content modifications and determine the suitability for inclusion of the suggestions in the future, while retaining the focus on the core program.

8 ONGOING DATA COLLECTION

It is recommended that the program continue to collect data on outcomes as well as feedback from participants, staff, and program partners on potential program modifications. Detailed suggestions for ongoing data collection are included in Appendix D.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that program management continue to collect data on outcomes as well as feedback from participants, staff, and program partners on potential program modifications.

9 CONCLUSION

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was largely implemented as designed, with a few variances due mainly to scheduling difficulties. The program succeeded in attracting its target audience, although the number of participants was less than half of the original target. Interviews with program participants, staff, and program partners indicated, however, that the small number of participants worked well in creating the conditions for the connections with staff, with each other, and with community agencies that were key to the program's success. By offering a supportive coordinator and experiential learning for a small group of participants with common issues and experiences, the program created an environment that increased participants' motivation to attend and engaged them in their learning. Participants indicated that the combination of feeling supported and having new ways of managing their lives in key areas (food security, finances, wellness, parenting, relationships, etc.) provided the impetus for them to move forward with their goals. Participants, school staff, and program partners provided strong qualitative evidence in support of program effectiveness for both cohorts of program participants in increasing food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience, and in developing a more positive home environment. Progress was noted on the Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators of high school graduation and youth aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training, with evidence that the program supported participants in graduating and in becoming engaged in post-secondary education and employment.

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

PROGRAM COMPONENTS	Secondary School Education	Career Pathway	Personal/Family Life
INPUTS	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, Adult Training Network, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, student retention counsellor, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen
ACTIVITIES	Recruitment, experiential learning (culinary training, certifications, workshops), connections with PACE, coaching/mentoring	Pathway planning (post-sec ed, training, employment), experiential learning, resume prep, connections with agencies, coaching	Workshops (positive parenting, financial lit., wellness, food security), connections with agencies and other participants, coaching
OUTPUTS	Training, certification, workshop sessions; classroom learning; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. secondary school education	Training, certification, workshop sessions; pathway planning, resume development; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. pathways	Training, workshop sessions; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. personal/family life
SHORT- TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	Increased knowledge and experience re. culinary, financial, wellness, parenting (self-report, staff report); increased connection to PACE (self-report, staff report)	Increased knowledge of pathways (self-report, staff report); increased level of preparedness (training, pathway plan, resume, self-report, staff); connections to community resources (self-report, staff)	Increased knowledge and experience re. culinary, financial, wellness, parenting (self-report, staff report); increased connection to community resources and to other program participants (self-report, staff)
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	Increased engagement in education (% completing program, self-report, staff report); increased performance at school (# credits earned, self-report, staff report)	Increased engagement in pursuing pathway (% implementing plan, self-report, staff report); increased accessing of related community resources (% accessing)	Increased confidence , self-advocacy, implementing wellness, positive parenting, financial, food security practices (self-report, staff report); increased accessing of related community resources (% accessing)
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	High school graduation (% graduating within one year of program completion)	Youth engaged in employment/post-sec education/ training (% engaged within 6 months of high school graduation)	Increased positive home environment (self-report); increased resilience (CD-RISC scale, self-report, staff report)

APPENDIX B: OUTCOME INDICATORS

The following tables contain the outcomes and indicators, organized by program goals (food security, self-sufficiency, resilience and positive home environment).

Table 1: Immediate Food Security Outcomes and Indicators

Immediate Food Security	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased culinary knowledge/experience (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased financial knowledge/experience (target: 80% of participants)
	Connection to food security community resources (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing food security resources at school (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased use of culinary skills at home (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed family budget (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing community resources related to immediate food security within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Long-term outcomes related to Food Security are covered under Self-Sufficiency (below)

Table 2: Self-Sufficiency Outcomes and Indicators

Self-Sufficiency	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased knowledge/experience in certifications and resume-building (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to school (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased accessing of school services (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased knowledge re. pathway (target: 90% of participants)
	Received coaching/mentoring re. pathway (target: 90% of participants)
	Culinary training attendance (target: 80% attendance)
	Increased knowledge for culinary job (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed certifications (target: 80% of participants completing each certification)
	Completed resume (target: 90% of participants)
	More prepared to start on pathway (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased connection to pathway resources (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased engagement in education (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased confidence in class (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed program (target: 90% of participants)
	Earned 3 credits (target: 80% of participants)
	Enrolled in additional credits after program (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased engagement in pursuing post-secondary education/employment/training (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing initial pathway steps (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing pathway resources within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Graduated within 1 year of program completion (target: 80% of participants)
	Engaged in post-secondary education, employment, training within 6 months of graduation (target: 80% of participants)

Table 3: Resilience and Positive Home Environment Outcomes and Indicators

Resilience/Positive Home Environment	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased knowledge/experience in wellness and family-related topics (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to personal/family life-related resources (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to other participants (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased confidence (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased self-advocacy (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing wellness strategies (target: 90% of participants)
	Implementing positive parenting (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing financial strategies (target: 80% of participants)
	Support of/from other participants (target: 80% of participants) Accessing community resources related to personal/family life within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Increased resilience (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased positive home environment (target: 80% of participants)

APPENDIX C: THEORY OF CHANGE

Goals

The goals of the initiative are to increase participants' food security, self-sufficiency and resilience through culinary training, completing high school, designing and implementing a career pathway plan (post-secondary education, training, employment), and establishing a more positive home environment and personal well-being. These changes in the lives of the participants also benefit their children, providing an intergenerational impact through addressing the ongoing food insecurity faced by these families and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Assumptions

- Supporting single female parents in completing high school, pursuing their career pathway, building resilience, increasing food security, and establishing a positive home environment will improve their life outcomes and can increase their children's health, growth, and development outcomes and aid in breaking the cycle of poverty.
- Most single female parents 18+ who have not completed high school and who have limited work experience require additional program supports to assist them in finishing their credits, pursuing their career pathway, building resilience, and establishing a positive home environment.
- Current programs to support pregnant teenagers and young mothers in completing high school include age restrictions that create a gap in supports for those over 24 or who have children over the age of one year.
- Women taking part in the enhanced single parent program must have childcare arrangements. The program cannot provide childcare due to staffing requirements; childcare subsidies and spaces are available in the community.
- Experiential learning is engaging and will assist students in acquiring credits as well as life skills, employment skills, certifications, and training.
- Connecting with a caring, supportive staff member at school assists students in re-engaging with their studies and persisting until completion.
- Single parents benefit from the support of a community of others who are facing similar challenges.
- Bringing community supports into one central location reduces barriers to access faced by single parents, and the assistance of a supportive staff member aids in navigating relevant resources.
- Support is required to assist the participants in managing life issues as they arise, allowing them to continue to participate in the program.
- Most single female parents with low socio-economic status experience significant levels of stress and disruption that affect their ability to focus on education, employment, and positive parenting. Wellness strategies and the support of the

- coordinator are important aids in assisting them to manage and diminish the effects of stress.
- Increasing culinary skills in combination with financial literacy related to food and family increases food security in the short term, and providing culinary training and certifications assists with credit acquisition and employability, aiding long-term food security.

Theory of Change

Based on the assumptions above, the Enhanced Single Parent Program is designed to provide the experiential learning and supports needed to assist female single parents who are over 18 in completing high school, designing and implementing steps toward their chosen post-secondary goals, increasing their resilience, and building a more positive home environment. The core of the program is the culinary component, which aids food security while increasing confidence and sense of community, as well as credit acquisition, employability skills, and certifications. The program integrates key supports from Peterborough community agencies, assisting students in connecting with these supports and in benefitting from their services, while using these experiences to achieve credit requirements. The significant levels of stress and disruption in the lives of these students, as well as their often-negative prior school experiences, make it crucial that the program coordinator be a caring, welcoming individual who encourages students in their reconnection with school, assists them in resolving issues as they arise, and facilitates the establishment of a community of support among the students. Through their achievements in acquiring new skills and certifications as well as parenting and wellness strategies, and through supporting and receiving support from each other and from the coordinator, participants gain confidence, increase their ability to advocate for themselves and others, build resilience, increase self-sufficiency, and establish a more positive home environment.

APPENDIX D: ONGOING DATA COLLECTION

It is recommended that the program continue to collect data on outcomes as well as feedback from participants, staff, and program partners on potential program modifications. Suggested data collection is organized below by data source. It is recommended that tracking be organized by participant and by cohort. If the program is offered again in the future, these cohorts could be tracked as well, providing informed consent is obtained.

Program Completion Questionnaire

For future cohorts of the SPP, PACE could administer a program completion questionnaire. Questions could include:

- What was the most useful part of the program? The least useful?
- Was the program material relevant to you?
- Are you using any of things you've learned? If yes, what are you using?
- What did you enjoy about your participation in the program?
- How can we improve the program for the future?
- Please share any additional comments about your experience with the program.

School Records

For future cohorts of the SPP, PACE could collect the following data:

- Number of participants who attended the program on at least one day
- Number of participants who completed the program
- Credits earned in the program per participant
- Credits earned in parallel to the program per participant
- Completed certifications per participant

At the end of every semester, PACE could use its school records to determine the following data per cohort:

- Credits earned per participant since they completed the program
- Number of participants who have graduated

Online Survey

An anonymous online survey could be sent to former participants to collect data on outcomes after program participation. Each cohort could be sent a specific version (e.g., different titles) of the survey to enable tracking by program cohort. Questions could include:

- Are you currently (check all that apply): working full-time, working part-time, in education (high school, college, training), at home with child/children, other (please specify), comment box
- Have you used the services of any community agencies since the program ended? yes, no, comment box
- Are you currently using what you learned in the program? (check all that apply): culinary, wellness, finances, parenting, other (please specify), comment box

- What was the most useful part of the program? The least useful? (comment box)
- How could the program be improved? (comment box)
- Please share any additional comments about your experience with the program. (comment box)

Partner Agency Feedback

An email or brief online survey could be sent to partner agencies to gather their feedback on the delivery block. Questions could include:

- Were you involved in recruiting participants for the program? If so, how well did that process work? Are there any changes you could suggest? Are there any other methods/partners that you would recommend to assist with recruitment?
- What differences did you observe between the groups of participants? (if the partner has been involved in more than one delivery block)
- What impacts did you observe from the program? Were there any unanticipated positive or negative impacts?
- Were there any challenges in implementing the program from your perspective?
- Could you suggest any improvements to the way that the program is implemented?
- Did you conduct an evaluation of your part of the program? If so, are there any parts of that evaluation that you'd like to share?
- Please share any additional comments about your experience with the program.

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Enhanced Single Parent Project

Process Evaluation

For the

**Kawartha Pine Ridge
District School Board**

Charterfield
CONSULTING

August 2018

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Executive Summary

Program Overview

The Enhanced Single Parent Project is designed to support female single parents who are 18+ and working towards completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma at the Peterborough Alternative and Continuing Education high school (PACE). The program is being offered in two delivery blocks from March-June and September-December 2018. Each delivery block involves three weeks of preparation, ten weeks of program delivery, and two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. The program runs from 10:00 a.m. -2:00 p.m. five days per week for ten weeks. It provides small, inclusive group learning with an emphasis on the development of wellness strategies, life/parenting skills, and career-pathway skills and planning through a culinary program as well as involvement of various community services/supports.

Program content for the first block addressed food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience from a number of angles. Immediate food security content centred around increasing culinary skills, financial literacy related to food and family, access to school food security supports such as hot lunches, and awareness of local resources such as the food box, community gardens, gleaning, and the farmer's market. Longer-term food security and self-sufficiency content was focused on culinary training and certifications that aided in credit acquisition and employability, high school graduation, post-secondary pathway planning, resume preparation, and connections to a local employment agency. Personal and family wellness content included culinary skills and nutrition, positive parenting, mindfulness and yoga, mental health, family court support, and healthy relationships. All of this program content was intended to assist participants in increasing resilience and establishing a more positive home environment for themselves and their children.

Evaluation Overview

This process evaluation was conducted of the first delivery block to determine the extent to which the project was implemented as planned and to assess the project's effectiveness in assisting the first cohort of participants to increase food security, self-sufficiency and resilience, using Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators (high school graduation; youth not in education, employment, or training) as well as project-specific outcome indicators (see Appendix A for the program's logic model and Appendix B for a list of outcome indicators). The evaluation's design is quasi-experimental, collecting data at intervals for each cohort and using multiple data sources to allow triangulation. Program participants in the first cohort provided information to the evaluation through intake forms, a focus group, questionnaires, and individual interviews; program staff, other school staff, and partner agencies were also interviewed. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the first block data was conducted, and recommendations have been proposed based on the findings.

Limited data was collected from participants at the beginning of the first delivery block, since the evaluator was not yet involved. Data regarding pre-program knowledge and experience for the first cohort was collected in the exit questionnaire and is based on participant estimation of pre-program knowledge and experience. Baseline data will be collected at the beginning of the second delivery block to determine pre-program knowledge and experience for the second cohort.

An impact evaluation will be conducted after the second delivery block, examining the effectiveness of the revised program in assisting the first and second cohort in achieving outcomes and identifying any further proposed program modifications that emerge. Participants from the first cohort will be included in this evaluation to determine the medium-term impacts of the program.

Key Findings

Program Implementation

The Enhanced Single Parent Program was largely implemented as planned and included all of the elements in its design. Minor variances were caused by delays in hiring the program coordinator, which pushed back the program start date, and by the tight 10-week schedule in which a few of the planned activities were unable to be accommodated. The program succeeded in attracting its target audience, although the number of participants was half of the original target. Interviews with program participants, staff, and program partners indicate, however, that this number of participants worked well in creating the conditions for the connections with staff, with each other, and with community agencies that were key to the program's success. Nine out of 11 participants (82%) completed the program (the program target was 90%). Individual attendance of those who completed the program ranged from 68% to 96%, with an average of 81% and a median of 80% (program target: 80%). Participants and school staff identified appointments, sick children, and changes in their lives outside of school as major challenges in attendance. Other challenges noted by school staff and program partners were punctuality and cell phone use during program time.

Immediate Food Security

All of the participants indicated that they were using the culinary skills that they learned at home, and several noted that they didn't cook at home previously and were now confident in preparing food for their family. Other immediate food security supports included the participants taking home food that they prepared in the culinary sessions, as well as connecting participants with food support provided to the school community through hot lunches on Fridays and through the student retention counsellor, who brought food and other essentials from Kawartha Food Share to school. Finally, the program addressed financial literacy in family management, looking at ways to make the most effective use of their income and to avoid financial pitfalls that would affect their ability to have access to nutritious food. It also connected participants with community resources for immediate assistance with food security, such as the Food Box, gleaning, community gardens, and community kitchens. Participants met all of the short-term outcomes and three out of four medium-term outcomes related to immediate food

security. Longer-term food security was covered by the outcomes related to self-sufficiency, discussed below.

Self-Sufficiency

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing self-sufficiency through education, training, employment, and connections with relevant community agencies. Participants and school staff concurred that the program was effective in increasing student engagement, with participants noting that the hands-on training was well suited to their learning style and the small group format allowed them to share experiences. The skills and experience acquired through the training sessions and workshops contributed to credit acquisition; all participants who completed the program earned three credits, with one participant earning four credits (target: 80% earning 3 credits). As well, three participants earned an additional credit in parallel to the program, and one participant earned two additional credits.

All but one of the participants who completed the program were within five credits of completing their secondary school diploma. Of the eight participants who were close to graduating, seven finished their remaining requirements through the program or in parallel to it and graduated in June 2018. The target for the program is an 80% graduation rate within one year of program completion; the participants in the first delivery block attained a 78% graduation rate at program completion. Participants and school staff attributed the high graduation rate to the momentum created through the program. The two participants who did not graduate in June 2018 both indicated that they were enrolled in additional courses for the following semester. Two of the participants who graduated applied to college and were accepted. Several of the participants planned to enter the workforce after the program finished, and others planned to work to build resources for post-secondary education. Two participants indicated an interest in self-employment; both had skills that would lend themselves to starting their own businesses.

Participants had the opportunity to earn a number of employment-related certifications through the program: Smart Serve, Food Handler's, First Aid, and Customer Service and Point of Sale training. Three participants already had their Food Handler's certification; the other six completed theirs in the program (100% completion). Two participants already had Smart Serve certification, and six more received it through the program (89%). Eight received First Aid certification (89%), and six received the Customer Service/Point of Sale training (67%). The program target was an 80% completion rate per certification. Participants noted that the certifications were a motivation for joining the program and would be useful in certain post-secondary programs as well as in employment.

Finally, seven out of nine participants (78%) were connected or planning to connect with Employment Planning and Counselling (a community employment agency) to assist them in their job search (target: 70% within six months of program completion), most through the Youth Job Connection program that offers paid training as well as work placements. The evaluation will follow up with participants in six months to determine their progress

in meeting the long-term outcome of becoming engaged in post-secondary education, employment, or training (target: 80% engaged in EET within six months of graduation).

Resilience

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing resilience through addressing aspects of individual development, family and household, social context, and health (a detailed discussion of the definition of resilience and the factors predictive of resilience is included in Section 7.4 of this report).

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that the participants' confidence and self-advocacy levels increased during the program. All of the participants noted that they were implementing the techniques they learned in the parenting course (target: 80%); participants stated that their level of stress around parenting had decreased and the effectiveness of their parenting interactions had increased. All of the participants developed a household budget (target: 90%) and indicated that they were implementing the financial practices that were presented in the workshops or that they were already adept at financial management (target: 80%). The participants indicated that the discussions on healthy relationships were very helpful and some noted that they made changes in their relationships with partners as a result of these discussions. Another aspect of support for family and household issues was with navigating the family court system; participants indicated that they learned a great deal from these discussions.

Participants, school staff, and program partners concurred that one of the strengths of the program was in increasing the community of support available to the participants. This community of support involved the program coordinator, other participants, school staff, and community agencies. The coordinator played the central role in establishing a welcoming, supportive atmosphere in the program; all participants indicated a strong sense of connection to the coordinator and underlined how supportive she was in various situations. The participants also built a network of support with each other, with many indicating they had not anticipated how close they would become with other participants. They noted that this supportive environment allowed them to open up and share their experiences and to learn that others felt the same way or had gone through similar experiences. Participants also became connected to community agencies through the workshop facilitators in the program. The participants stated that they now know more about the community agencies and what programs are available, and that they feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. One participant noted, "Before it was hard to seek the proper help. I didn't know who to turn to. Now I feel 1000% more confident and I know where to go." As the participants move into post-secondary education, training, and employment, their community of support may change. The evaluation will follow up with them after the second delivery block to determine if they have maintained a community of support through these transitions, and if they are accessing personal/family life-related community resources (target: 70% of participants accessing within 6 months of program completion).

The major health-related interventions of the program included food security, nutrition, mental health supports, and mindfulness and yoga sessions. All participants stated that they were implementing the wellness strategies that they had learned in the program

(target: 80%); participants indicated that the mindfulness techniques and breathing were very effective in reducing anxiety and stress. All participants noted aspects of their home environment that were more positive because of their participation in the program (target: 80%), which was a long-term outcome for the personal/family life component of the program.

To obtain further evidence of changes in level of resilience, the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10) was administered to the participants at the end of the first delivery block (due to delays in engaging the evaluator, baseline values were not obtained for this group). The total score for the CD-RISC-10 ranges from 0-40; a mean score of 25.6 was obtained with the participants at the end of the first delivery block, with a median of 26. Individual scores ranged from 18-33. Most of the individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data gathered from interviews with participants and the coordinator. Interpretation of these scores will be conducted at the end of the second delivery block since baseline and final values will be collected for the second cohort.

Overall Program Impact

Participants, school staff, and program partners offered many comments on the overall impact of the program. A selection of these comments is included here.

- When I was doing PLAR [an individualized program at PACE], I was on my own. This is all together, with just single parents. Before, I felt like a loser, I felt alone. I think this program is really important, really cool.
- We built up confidence in the group. [The coordinator] and the other teachers were giving us confidence, for example to go hand out resumes. [The coordinator] really helped with coping with everything, and yoga was really helpful for calming down. It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food. Everything has completely changed with the course.
- Their self-confidence increased. A number of them applied to college. They wouldn't have had the confidence to apply without this program. They looked healthier, they were eating better, and they were more self-assured, with their heads higher. They were proud of their accomplishments.
- There was a total change in these girls. It's the best program that I've seen in my 22 years. The results were just amazing. ... So many things changed for them and now we will see them graduate.
- At the beginning, they said, "I'm never going to graduate this year." By the end, one was accepted to college. I was worried that nine participants were not enough to make a big impact, but when you see the change in their lives, the individual impacts, it made me say, "How can we make this broadly available?" They are not only finishing high school but taking their next steps.

Program Modifications

Suggestions for potential program modifications were offered by participants, program staff, and program partners regarding recruiting, scheduling, number of participants, eligibility, and program content.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that program management decide on eligibility for the upcoming delivery block, clarify the promotional materials if necessary, and communicate the decision to program partners, along with any longer-term plan to examine options.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that program management review the suggestions for program content modifications and determine the suitability for inclusion of the suggestions in the future, while retaining the focus on the core program.

Conclusion

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was largely implemented as designed, with a few variances due mainly to scheduling difficulties. Through a program offering experiential learning for a small group of participants with common issues and experiences and a supportive coordinator, the participants were in an environment that increased their motivation to attend and engaged them in their learning. Participants indicated that the combination of feeling supported and having new ways of managing their lives in key areas (financial, wellness, parenting, relationships, etc.) provided the impetus for them to move forward with their goals. Participants, school staff, and program partners provided strong qualitative evidence in support of program effectiveness for the first cohort of program participants in increasing food security in the short term, as well as in laying the foundation for increased self-sufficiency, resilience, and positive home environment. The program is currently preparing for the second delivery block; an impact evaluation will be conducted of outcomes for the first and second cohorts after the program is complete.

Enhanced Single Parent Project

Process Evaluation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Enhanced Single Parent Project is designed to support female single parents who are 18+ and working towards completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma at the Peterborough Alternative and Continuing Education high school (PACE). The program is being offered in two delivery blocks from March-June and September-December 2018. Each delivery block involves three weeks of preparation, ten weeks of program delivery, and two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. It provides small, inclusive group learning with an emphasis on the development of wellness strategies, life/parenting skills, and career-pathway skills and planning through a culinary program as well as involvement of various community services/supports. The initiative is designed to improve food security in the short term by increasing culinary skills and financial literacy related to food and family, and in the longer term by providing culinary training and certifications that aid in credit acquisition and employability, as well as by assisting participants to graduate from high school and follow their post-secondary path.

This process evaluation was conducted of the first delivery block to determine the extent to which the project has been implemented as planned and to assess the project's effectiveness in assisting the first cohort of participants to increase food security, self-sufficiency and resilience, using Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators as well as project-specific outcome indicators. Program modifications are proposed and recommendations made based on the findings.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation's design is quasi-experimental. Participants self-select into the program, with two cohorts over the course of the program; the evaluation collects data at intervals for each of the cohorts. Multiple data sources are used to allow triangulation. Due to the small number of program participants, all participants are included in the evaluation.

The project is being delivered in two blocks, one from March-June 2018 and the other from September-December 2018. This report contains the results of the process evaluation conducted for the first delivery block.

The process evaluation examined two questions:

1. To what extent has the program been implemented as planned?

2. How effective was the program in assisting the first cohort of participants in increasing food security, self-sufficiency and resilience and in establishing a more positive home environment?

Poverty Reduction Strategy indicators (high school graduation; youth aged 15-29 who are not in education, employment, or training) as well as project-specific outcome indicators were used in determining program effectiveness (see Appendix A for the program's logic model and Appendix B for a list of outcome indicators). Recommendations have been proposed based on the findings.

An impact evaluation will be conducted after the second delivery block, examining the effectiveness of the revised program in assisting the first and second cohort in achieving outcomes and identifying any further proposed program modifications that emerge. Participants from the first cohort will be included in this evaluation to determine the medium-term impacts of the program. Recommendations regarding ongoing data collection will be made to allow the Enhanced Single Parent Project to continue to track performance on indicators for current and future cohorts.

2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected between April and July 2018. Delays in engaging the third-party evaluator resulted in limited baseline data collected for the first cohort. Complete baseline data will be collected for the second cohort.

In the first delivery block, participants completed an intake form administered by the program coordinator. An entrance questionnaire will be administered to the second cohort to determine baseline values for relevant indicators. Informed consent to participate in the evaluation was obtained from all participants who completed the program in the first cohort, as well as consent to follow up with these participants at the end of the second delivery block to obtain data on medium-term and long-term outcomes. The first cohort completed an exit questionnaire and individual interviews; a focus group was also held to gather feedback on the program. Key informant interviews were conducted with the program coordinator and other school staff (vice-principal, student retention counsellor, guidance counsellor), as well as the individuals from community agencies who delivered the program content, regarding program implementation and effectiveness. The program coordinator was also interviewed regarding the results obtained by individual participants.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data was conducted. Quantitative analysis was limited to descriptive statistics since the small number of participants precluded the extrapolation of the results to a larger population. Qualitative analysis identified feedback on program implementation and themes emerging from the data regarding program effectiveness as well as program modifications suggested by key informants.

2.2 Reporting

This report was prepared to summarize the process evaluation findings for the first delivery block as well as suggested program modifications and recommendations. A report will be prepared after the second delivery block with the findings from the impact evaluation.

2.3 Limitations

Limited data was collected from participants at the beginning of the first delivery block, since the evaluator was not yet involved. Data regarding pre-program knowledge and experience for the first cohort was collected in the exit questionnaire and is based on participant estimation of pre-program knowledge and experience. Baseline data will be collected at the beginning of the second delivery block to determine pre-program knowledge and experience for the second cohort.

No comparison group was established and therefore there is a risk that the results obtained with these participants may not be replicated with other groups. This risk is mitigated by comparing results obtained with both cohorts of the program and by collecting data from multiple sources (participants, program coordinator, other school staff, and program partners) to allow triangulation of data to support the validity of the findings.

EVALUATION QUESTION 1:

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE PROGRAM BEEN IMPLEMENTED AS PLANNED?

3 PROGRAM DESIGN

3.1 Goals

The goals of the initiative are to increase participants' food security, self-sufficiency and resilience through culinary training, completing high school, designing and implementing a career pathway plan (post-secondary education, training, employment), and establishing a more positive home environment and personal well-being. The program also aims to connect participants to a community of support both within the program and in the larger community. These changes in the lives of the participants are also intended to benefit their children, providing an intergenerational impact through addressing the ongoing food insecurity faced by these families and helping to break the cycle of poverty.

3.2 Background

The Enhanced Single Parent Project builds on a program offered in the previous two years at PACE as well as two other alternative education sites of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB), the Clarington Centre for Individual Studies (CCIS) and the Northumberland Centre for Individual Studies (NCIS). That program was funded through Single Parent Initiative grants from the Adult and Continuing Education branch of the Ministry of Education and ran from February-April both years. In 2016, sixteen 75-minute sessions (one period) were offered at PACE and six 75-minute sessions were offered at CCIS and NCIS. The program included wellness strategies, life and parenting skills, career pathway planning, and community supports and services; the PACE location also offered a culinary component. In 2017, the program was initially offered at all three sites, but the CCIS and NCIS sites were consolidated at CCIS partway through program delivery due to limited enrolment. In response to student feedback from the first year, the PACE location expanded to three periods per day for sixteen days in Year 2 and was therefore able to offer partial completion of two credits through the program, as well as opportunities for credit recovery.¹ There was a different program coordinator and chef in each year. The 2017 program coordinator developed the proposal for the enhanced program that was submitted to the Local Poverty Reduction Fund.

3.3 Design

The program is designed to engage students in skill-building through experiential learning and workshops on a variety of topics, with an emphasis on food security and wellness. Another key factor in the approach is the coordinator's ability to encourage students in their connection with school, assist them in resolving issues as they arise, and facilitate the establishment of a community of support among the students. PACE's vice-principal attended a sharing session of similar programs funded by the Ministry of Education grant before the program began at KPRDSB, and indicated, "In that session, some of the participants from other programs talked about their experiences. I realized there were two very important components: the importance of the connection that the participants made with the coordinator, and the bond that formed between the participants, giving them friendship and community."

Building on the experience gained through the previous two years of program delivery, the decision was made to focus the Enhanced Single Parent Program at PACE rather than delivering it at multiple sites simultaneously, to have the program run five days per week at PACE, and to extend program delivery to 10 weeks, to improve the support offered to students by increasing the amount of time spent in the program. The increased program time allows participants to complete three credits through the program and have opportunities for credit recovery as well as for earning additional credits in parallel to the program. The PACE location was selected since it had the largest group of potential participants and a teaching kitchen for the culinary sessions. As well, the urban location

¹ Credit recovery: students who have failed a course work with a teacher to retake the units in which they did not meet expectations, rather than retaking the entire course

helped to alleviate transportation issues and the on-site daycare was being used by some participants, simplifying their participation in the program.

The vice-principal indicated,

This year the program worked a lot better, with the new format. In previous years, the students loved the culinary part, but some did not attend the other day for the in-class time. This year we had better engagement. It was also the group of girls. They really felt kinship with each other and formed strong bonds quickly. They spent every day together and that made a big difference.

3.4 Eligibility

Eligibility for the program was advertised as:

- Single parent
- 18+ years of age
- Looking to complete the OSSD or upgrade²
- Wanting community supports and resources
- Requiring training and certifications for employment

Staff interpreted ‘single parent’ broadly, with the poster and website indicating, “Ask us if you wonder if this could be you.” The program coordinator noted, “As long as they reported themselves as ‘single’ on their tax form, then we accepted them. Their partnerships can change quickly.”

4 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The following section describes various aspects of program implementation, including staffing, program content, recruitment, program delivery, and reporting/planning. The first delivery block ran five days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for ten weeks from April-June 2018; the second delivery block will run from September-December 2018 with a second set of participants.

4.1 Staffing

Staffing consists of a program coordinator, with administrative support from the vice-principal and office staff as well as input from other staff such as the guidance counsellor and the PLAR³ teacher. In order to offer credits, the program coordinator must be a teacher and therefore the hiring process must follow KPRDSB human resource policies. Each program block runs for 15 weeks and is staffed by a long-term occasional teacher.

² OSSD: Ontario Secondary School Diploma; upgrading refers to retaking a course to improve the grade earned

³ The Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) program grants credits through assessments and through learning completed outside of school to students who are over 18 and who have been off a school register for at least 10 months.

The first block was originally intended to run from February to May 2018 but became delayed due to staffing issues. The coordinator was engaged from mid-March until the end of June, including three weeks of preparation, ten weeks of program delivery, and two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. In addition to the three periods per day of program delivery, the coordinator was available each day before and after the program to assist participants with completing additional credits and to provide coaching/mentoring assistance in other areas.

Staffing has been an ongoing challenge in every year of the program, since the position is short-term due to HR requirements. The program requires a teacher who is skilled at adapting the program to the individual participants' credit requirements, and is capable of creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere that engages participants, provides a safe space, and allows for the development of a supportive community of participants. The coordinator also supports participants through the daily challenges of their lives, responding to issues in areas such as housing, relationships, and finances. The Vice-Principal indicated, "We've been really lucky each year to find people who have been excellent coordinators." He noted that the position needs to be posted as early as possible so that there is a good pool of candidates, and that if it were possible to hire for longer periods of time, it would allow for more preparation time and flexibility in delivery.

The ongoing turnover in staff means that each coordinator must spend time at the outset becoming familiar with the program, the partner agencies, and the various supports available in the community. Past coordinators have been very supportive in helping the new coordinator to navigate this process. Continuity in staffing would lighten the load on the coordinator, especially in the initial weeks. The vice-principal noted that the position would ideally become part of the regular staffing at the school, providing more opportunity for continuity as well as certainty in program scheduling, which would facilitate recruitment and partner agency participation.

The coordinator indicated that three weeks for program preparation was challenging in the first delivery block, since she had not been involved previously and the schedule had not been developed. However, she felt that three weeks would be sufficient if the program retains a very similar schedule and is well documented. Because of the tight timeline, the first week of program delivery had fewer activities, which she noted was helpful in this instance to allow for extra preparation time.

Another key role in program delivery, although not a KPRDSB staff member, is the chef who provides the culinary training, since this training represents 40% of program activities. Again, there has been turnover in this position each year due to changes in partner agencies and availability. The chef who was involved in the first delivery block in 2018 has confirmed his availability for the second delivery block.

4.2 Program Content

In the three weeks before program delivery began, the coordinator determined the elements of the enhanced program based on the program proposal and on the schedule from previous years and contacted the partner agencies to set up the schedule. She

connected with a community agency that was involved in the previous session to find a new chef, since the previous chef was not available. The coordinator also acquired program materials, such as yoga mats and a mindfulness booklet.

Program content addressed food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience from a number of angles. Immediate food security content centred around increasing culinary skills, financial literacy related to food and family, access to school food security supports such as hot lunches, and awareness of local resources such as the food box, community gardens, gleaning, and the farmer's market. Longer-term food security and self-sufficiency content was focused on culinary training and certifications that aided in credit acquisition and employability, high school graduation, post-secondary pathway planning, resume preparation, and connections to a local employment agency. Personal and family wellness content included culinary skills and nutrition, positive parenting, mindfulness and yoga, mental health, family court support, and healthy relationships. All of this program content was intended to assist participants in achieving a more positive home environment.

Program content was delivered through Chef Günther Schubert, Rooted Lavender (mindfulness/yoga practitioner), and a number of community agencies: Peterborough Public Health (PPH), Employment Planning and Counselling (EPC), Community Counselling and Resource Centre (CCRC), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), the YWCA Peterborough Haliburton, Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre (KSAC), and Nourish Peterborough. A speaker from Investors Group (IG) also delivered a financial literacy session, and the Adult Training Network (ATN) at PACE provided a training session.

Program elements included:

- **Culinary training** (Chef Günther, 19 full-day sessions) All aspects of food preparation, with a focus on cooking at home and healthy eating
- **Tour of George Brown College's culinary program facilities and the St. Lawrence Market**, Toronto (Chef Günther, full day trip)
- **Healthy Eating for Healthy Families** (PPH, 1 full-day session) Nutrition and food preparation, food guidelines for young children, Canada's Food Guide
- **Come Cook with Us** (Nourish, 1 half-day session) Food Box and meal preparation, gleaning, community gardens
- **Farmer's Market tour** (downtown Peterborough)
- **Food Handler Training and Certification** (PPH, 1-day course)
- **Smart Serve** (EPC, 1-day course)
- **First Aid** (Canadian Red Cross, 2-day course)
- **Customer Service and Point of Sale training** (ATN, 1-day course)
- **Resume Building** (EPC, 1 full-day session) Effective resumes, individual resume preparation
- **Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting course** (PPH, 7 half-day sessions) Child development and effective parenting principles; practical guidelines for communication, respect, skill-building
- **Mindfulness** (Rooted Lavender, 5 half-day sessions)

- **Yoga** (Rooted Lavender, 5 half-day sessions)
- **Financial literacy** (CCRC 3 half-day sessions; IG 1 half-day session) Self-advocacy, budgeting, banking, credit, car insurance, payday loans, rent to own.
- **Mental health** (CMHA, 3 half-day sessions) CMHA programs and services, Mental Health 101, Stress Management
- **Family Court support** (YWCA, 1 half-day session) YWCA services, family court support, Q&A on family court issues
- **Healthy Relationships** (KSAC, 1 half-day session) KSAC services, healthy and abusive relationships

4.3 Recruitment

Recruitment was another major focus for the coordinator in the lead-up to program delivery. School staff such as the PLAR teacher, the principal, and the vice-principal identified potential participants. The coordinator then examined their credit counselling summary to determine if they already had the credits that were being offered through the program. Students who had expressed an interest or had not completed the program in the past were also contacted. In all, the coordinator contacted more than 20 potential participants.

Posters were prepared to advertise the program and were effective in recruiting some participants within the school. A poster was also displayed at the Employment Counselling and Resource Centre. As well, Peterborough Public Health posted information on its website and shared it on social media, which was effective at notifying staff at other local agencies and the City of Peterborough, who then contacted the coordinator for more information. PPH staff also recruited a participant through their Healthy Babies Healthy Children program. The vice-principal noted that community partners were ready to start recruiting earlier, but the delay in staffing caused uncertainty in the program start date and therefore the partners were told, “We can’t recruit yet.”

The coordinator indicated that it will be easier to advertise the program at the onset of the second delivery block since the program content will be very similar. She noted that the value of the program should be shared with school staff, potential participants, and partner agencies, including the opportunity to earn three credits and certifications as well as the graduation rate. As she pointed out, “Even the participant who had been involved in the earlier two programs was attracted by a new certification in First Aid.” She also indicated that community partners who have been involved in the first delivery block now know more about program content and what type of client would fit the program. Earlier communication with partners would allow more potential participants to be identified.

One of the most effective recruitment tools was word of mouth. Students who started on the first day of the program talked to other students and encouraged them to join the program. As the coordinator noted, “On Day 1 we had three students, Day 2 we had seven, and three started a week later.” This success in participants recruiting others helped to mitigate the short recruitment timeframe.

The coordinator established a website for the program and noted, “Once I got the website up and going, then I had something to give out to potential participants, so they could get a better idea of what the program would be. When I hear about a program, I want to go online and take a look at the website to get more information.” Although the coordinator’s telephone contact information was included on the poster, only a few students followed up by telephone, with most coming to the classroom or being contacted by the coordinator.

Most of the participants joined after the program started, which indicates that it may be important to maintain flexibility in accepting registrations after the first day, although this may not be necessary if there is more lead time for recruitment. The coordinator noted, “I loved the format, not having to tell people they have to wait until next semester because they missed the beginning.” She reflected that the program may need to consider, “What is the tipping point? How far into the program can we add people?” Also, as noted above, the first week of the program had fewer activities. The coordinator indicated, “It gave the opportunity for some to finish off what they were doing [in other classes]. I told them, ‘We’ll work it out. Just come.’” It may thus be important to provide a brief transition time for some of the participants who are completing other course work or adjusting availability in work schedules, especially if the recruitment timeline is short.

Several recruitment barriers for participants were identified. Childcare subsidies were available through Ontario Works and there was a childcare provider in the school building; however, participants were required to make their own childcare arrangements. More lead time may be required for those who do not currently have childcare in place. Transportation was an issue for one potential participant who lived outside the area serviced by public transit. One potential participant was working half days and decided not to participate in the program; another potential participant had nearly completed a final credit needed for graduation and was concerned that it would not be possible to combine the program with the time required to finish the credit before the end of the school year. A number of the potential participants contacted by the coordinator did not identify a reason for their choice not to participate; some indicated that they were interested but never registered, and others did not return calls.

4.4 Program Delivery

The coordinator and guidance counsellor determined which credits each participant would gain through the program. As the guidance counsellor noted,

Rather than having to take certain credits, we were able to use the program content and see what credits would make sense for each of them. It was very flexible. We saw which credits they needed and what could be done through the program while still covering the expectations for the courses. It certainly worked out best to look individually at what they needed, what they could get with the program, and what else they would need to graduate, such as English.

In this way, the program was able to provide maximum benefit for each participant in completing requirements for graduation, rather than only offering a pre-determined set of credits.

The coordinator reported that the majority of the schedule was determined before program delivery began and so coordination with the program partners was minimal after that point. She indicated that 80% of her time during the ten weeks of program delivery was devoted to providing the program participants with coaching, mentoring and advocacy support related to issues arising in their lives. She noted that this aspect of the program was “intense and exhausting” due to the need for constant support and the range and urgency of the issues (partner and former partner relationships, food insecurity, transportation, housing, income support, employment, parenting, health, family court, childcare, family relationships). Although time-consuming, this aspect of program delivery was instrumental in building the bonds of trust between the coordinator and the participants and in supporting them in their continued participation.

The coordinator was not involved in teaching or delivering program content during the sessions. However, she attended the sessions and ensured that topics required in the curriculum were covered in the workshops (for example, simple and compound interest). She also assisted participants with credits that they were completing in parallel to the program; she was available for an hour before and after the program each day to work with students individually. She noted, “I have worked at alternative sites before and taught a lot of different programs in alternative settings, so I knew how to accommodate their needs.”

Scheduling issues caused some changes to the planned program, due both to the tight timeline for program development before delivery began and to the limited availability of time slots in the ten-week delivery period because of the number of activities scheduled. The following sessions did not occur due to scheduling issues:

- Aspire, a mentoring program that matches youth aged 17-25 with an adult in the community to achieve training and employment success
- Vision boards and planning for the future session from Community Counselling and Resource Centre
- Follow-up financial literacy session by the Investors Group representative

There was also a plan to do a supermarket tour, but the supermarket required higher participant numbers and so the tour was cancelled. One day of the program was cancelled due to inclement weather.

4.5 Reporting/Planning

The final phase of the program consists of two weeks of reporting and planning for the next delivery block. The coordinator also noted that she completed the grading of assignments and final assessments during this time for the students who were completing credits in parallel to the program. She was interviewed for the program evaluation as well as providing individual assessments of each program participant’s progress on outcomes. She also designed and produced a recipe book for the participants, including all of the recipes that they had prepared over the course of the program.

5 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The grant proposal indicated that the target number of participants per delivery block was 20. The program succeeded in recruiting eleven participants in the first delivery block, two of whom did not complete the program. A discussion of the target number of participants is included in Section 8.3.

5.1 Participant Characteristics

Participants who completed the program in the first delivery block were nine young mothers (19-29 years old) who identified themselves as ‘single’ on their tax returns. Some currently had partners; the relationship status of several participants changed during the program and others were in unstable relationships. Some were living independently, and others were living with parents or partners. Most had one child, several had two, and one was also pregnant. All were previously registered with PACE, either in the Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) program or in the regular day program; some indicated that they were actively working towards credits before the program began and others were not. About half had participated in the School for Young Moms⁴ program at PACE. The coordinator indicated that academic ability was not an issue for most of the participants; however, they were not always confident in their own academic capacities. All but one of the participants were within five credits of completing their OSSD. One had participated in the program over the previous two years as well. Two of the participants were working part-time when they started the program.

Some of the participants used the childcare located in the building. School staff indicated that it was a “huge advantage” to having the children in the onsite childcare, with the mothers talking to the children about “going to school together, providing a great model for the children.”

Two students did not complete the program. One participant came for one day and was very interested in the program, but her life circumstances changed, and she notified the coordinator that she was unable to continue. Another person attended the program for several weeks without being officially registered, since she requested a delayed transfer in order to complete another credit. She did not carry out the steps that were required to complete the transfer process, causing issues that led to her leaving the school. No post-program evaluation data was collected from these two students.

5.2 Motivation for Participation

On the program intake form, participants were asked to give three reasons ‘why this program is personally suited or ideal to you.’ The most frequent responses related to obtaining credits/graduating and to gaining particular skills, followed by social reasons. Two participants did not give reasons why the program was suited to them. (*Note: this*

⁴ The School for Young Moms (SYM) at PACE supports pregnant students and mothers under 21 with a child up to one year old. Students work on high school credits and develop their parenting skills, while receiving on-site care for their infants and assistance with their other needs.

section includes data for the participant who only attended for one day, since that participant also completed an intake form. No differences were noted in her data compared to other participants).

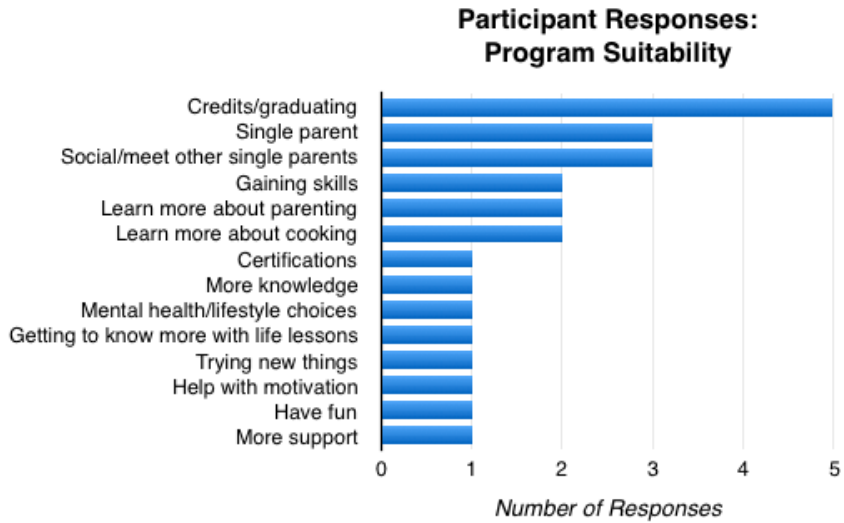


Figure 1: Participant Responses on Program Suitability

On the intake form, there were also five statements regarding interest in the program with instructions to ‘Check all the options that apply explaining your interest in the program.’ Two participants did not complete this section of the intake form.

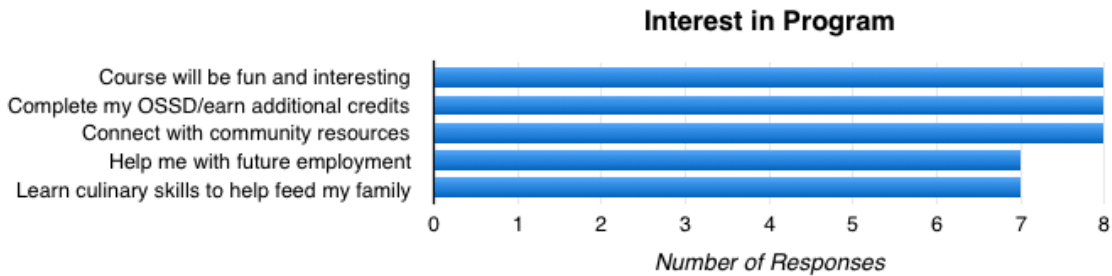


Figure 2: Interest in Program

Participant responses regarding program suitability for them as well as their interest in the Enhanced Single Parent Program indicate that the program was successful at attracting its target audience of single parents who were seeking to complete their OSSD, gain skills, and connect with each other and with community resources in a supportive environment.

6 SUMMARY

The Enhanced Single Parent Program was largely implemented as planned and included all of the elements in its design. Minor variances were caused by delays in hiring the program coordinator, which pushed back the program start date, and by the tight 10-week schedule in which a few of the planned activities were unable to be accommodated. The program succeeded in attracting its target audience, although the number of participants was half of the original target. Interviews with program participants, staff, and program partners indicate, however, that this number of participants worked well in creating the conditions for the connections with staff, with each other, and with community agencies that were key to the program's success, as is further discussed in Section 8.3.

EVALUATION QUESTION 2:

HOW EFFECTIVE WAS THE PROGRAM IN ASSISTING THE FIRST COHORT OF PARTICIPANTS IN INCREASING FOOD SECURITY, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND RESILIENCE AND IN ESTABLISHING A MORE POSITIVE HOME ENVIRONMENT?

7 PROGRAM IMPACT

Broad consensus on the impact of the program was expressed by participants, school staff, and program partners, and was supported by evidence of progress on outcomes. Preliminary data regarding specific outcomes is discussed below under food security, self-sufficiency, resilience, and positive home environment.

7.1 Key Aspects of the Program

Interviewees identified three key aspects of the program that contributed to the achievement of outcomes: creating connections, skill-building, and wellness. The connections that were established with program staff, other participants, the school community, and the larger community were the foundation of the program. The importance of each of these connections to the achievement of outcomes is detailed below. The other key aspects of the program – skill-building and wellness – are discussed in the sections on specific outcomes that follow.

7.1.1 Creating Connections

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that a major contributing factor to the program's success in achieving outcomes was the connection that participants

established with program staff, with each other, and with the school community and the larger community.

Connecting with Program Staff

The coordinator played the central role in establishing the welcoming, supportive nature of the program, mentoring the participants, coaching them through challenging situations, and advocating for them. All participants indicated a strong sense of connection to the coordinator and underlined how supportive she was in various situations. Comments included:

- When I first started the program, I wasn't sure if it would be a good fit. ... [The coordinator] made sure I was comfortable and checked if I needed anything.
- [The coordinator] helped us to say how we're feeling and if we had any concerns or questions. If we were concerned we could bring it up, and not feel silly about questions. She said, "Ask as many questions as you want."
- [The coordinator] is a really good support system. She's the main source of support and help dealing with stuff. I had a lot of problems and she has been really helpful.
- [The coordinator] made a difference in my life, talked me through issues that I was having with [my child]'s father. She helps all of us with so many things, anything we need. She is always there for us.

Program partners and other school staff observed that the coordinator played a key role in supporting participants, with one indicating that she created a 'second home' feeling in the class. They noted that she gave the participants the opportunity to build a relationship with a supportive, trusting, caring adult, and indicated that she was a mentor and role model for the participants. One commented that the coordinator used her knowledge of the participants' situations to bring forward relevant discussion points during the workshop sessions. Another indicated that the coordinator "did an incredible job and they developed a great relationship. She held their hands when they needed it and encouraged them to do things themselves when they could." A program partner stated,

The value in the program is in overcoming poverty and the obstacles that keep people from accessing this kind of assistance. An intervention like this can be really powerful in moving people onto a new trajectory. A key factor is that [the coordinator] made the girls feel that she cared about them from the first day. She created that trust that allowed them to open up and talk about what they needed help with. She gave them a point of entry into the system so that we could offer resources to them.

Although the chef was not a school board employee, the culinary training was such a large part of the program, representing 40% of the program content, that this position had a strong influence on the success of the program. All of the program participants identified the culinary training as a highlight of the program; the chef also organized a tour of the St. Lawrence Market and the culinary program facilities at George Brown College, which was another program highlight for those who attended. The participants noted the chef's patience, with one remarking, "He showed us the right way to do

everything. He showed us how to use the knives, not just once, but many times until we got it.” They appreciated the opportunity to take food home for their families, and to make a special meal at school and invite their family members. Participants also noted that the chef was coming to see them graduate. Several school staff described the chef as “amazing.” One said, “They would tell me, ‘We’ve got to get back to the kitchen.’ They didn’t want to let [the chef] down or the others when they were working together.” When participants spoke of the program staff, they included both the coordinator and the chef, considering them both to be their teachers, in contrast to the facilitators who delivered workshops.

Connecting with Peers

Most of the participants knew each other before the program began; some were friends and others were acquaintances. One participant did not know anyone else in the program at the outset. The participants built a strong network of support with each other; many indicated they had not anticipated how close they would become with other participants. They noted that this supportive environment allowed them to open up and share their experiences and to learn that others felt the same way or had gone through similar experiences. Many of their comments about connecting with peers have been included in this report to give an indication of the range and depth of support they experienced:

- I went to high school with some of them and met the others at PACE, but we became closer through the program. We all worked together. Now we have good friendships and strong connections. You feel like you can trust each other.
- I could ask questions because it was a closed environment, not in front of a group of people I didn’t know.
- We also have a lot of common ground and can commiserate on some things. Everyone’s been looking out for each other, and I didn’t anticipate that.
- We all have something in common and [the coordinator] gave us the space to talk to each other. We’ve had really crappy partners. Everyone is going through the same thing. We build each other up – like a family.
- It was great to meet so many people and actually graduate with friends. I felt lonely a lot because I didn’t have friends who knew what I was dealing with. [The coordinator] is great and the other people in the program are great. I feel lucky to have met them all. When I talked about issues, other people were saying, ‘Me too.’ I didn’t feel annoying for talking about it like I did with people who aren’t parents.
- Everybody made me want to come to school. It made it so welcoming. With the parenting program we decided on group rules and one was a ‘no judgment zone.’ I really liked that. It made everyone feel more welcomed. We are a lot closer now because of the program. I’m better friends with all the others. We are all parents, so we understand what it’s like to have kids. I have so many new friends.
- We are so comfortable around each other now. The rules for the classroom that we did with the positive parenting – no judgment – really helped. Everything we say is confidential. We all agreed to not talk about it outside. It made everyone feel more safe.
- I feel a lot closer to them now. We support and love each other. When I was figuring out about [a major decision], I was stressed out and everyone was so

supportive, [the coordinator] too. I don't think I would have been able to [make that major life change] without the program. I learned a lot.

- We built that tight bond and now we want to walk on stage together [graduate].

The coordinator noted, "I was a bit skeptical of how it was going to work out, with all of the participants knowing each other except for one, seeing them come into the program in pairs. But as a group, they took everybody in." She indicated that they mentored each other, helping with issues that some had already faced. She also stated that several of them were very strong at standing up for anyone they felt was not heard or was unjustly treated, and that others were talented problem-solvers. For the participant who made a major life change during the program, the coordinator noted, "The support she got from the other girls to [make the change] was phenomenal. Knowing people care and that she would be OK was what supported her in doing it." The coordinator identified "having a voice" as a key experience for the participants, indicating that as the program progressed, the participants began to open up and talk about parts of their lives that they don't normally share with everyone, and to ask the community agencies for help with their issues in front of the group. The coordinator also stated, "They had accountability to each other. If they were absent, the others would ask why they weren't there."

When asked to identify the most important aspects of the program, a number of the other school staff and program partners indicated the supportive peer relationships that formed. They noted that "creating a supportive community, not feeling alone" was a key benefit to the participants. One staff member said that it was a confidence builder for the participants, doing the program together and relying on each other's support. A program partner noted, "The camaraderie is one of the most important aspects of the program. To know that you're doing OK, it's normal to have these feelings, running out of money, whatever they're experiencing is experienced by others too." Another indicated, "It was also a place to go and be together, without the children. It gave them a chance to focus on themselves, on learning for themselves and for their children." A school staff member stated, "They definitely became like family to each other. They tended to be suspicious of other girls before. They became cohesive and were doing things together with their children outside of school." Another noted, "The biggest difference that I saw was in self-confidence and social skills. I couldn't believe how much those increased. They supported each other as a group and learned to work with each other." In the impact evaluation phase, these participants will be interviewed again to determine whether the connections with peers have continued.

Connecting with School

Research indicates that feeling connected to school is an indicator of engagement, leading to better educational outcomes. [Reschly et al., 2014] Some participants felt comfortable at school before the program began and had good relationships with teachers. For others, the program increased their connection to school. Participants noted:

- I like the school a lot more now. I'm more comfortable walking in. I felt judged before. This program has completely changed my experience of it. ... I didn't like sitting in a room by myself with strangers I don't know. I built connections to [the coordinator] and the other teachers, which helps.

- [The student retention counsellor] has especially helped. He has been super helpful with everything. If I need something, I can go and ask.
- This program worked better for me. It was more one-on-one. In actual high school I never knew what was going on. I was getting 50s and 60s, but here I'm getting 80s and 90s. The teachers here are more relatable, more personal. We call them by their first name – it's less formal. There's freedom, we're not being controlled for everything, even going to the bathroom.
- I felt more part of PACE.

An increase in the use of key supports/services, such as the student retention counsellor, the hot lunch program, and the PACE boutique (for second-hand clothing and other items) over the course of the program indicates an increased connection to PACE. The number of students using each of the supports/services increased, with the exception of a decrease in those accessing the guidance counsellor (potentially due to the lack of need to consult the guidance counsellor for students who were graduating and not continuing directly to post-secondary studies) and a constant number accessing the services of the student success teacher. The vice-principal's position has been included in the list of supports/services since he was directly involved in supporting the program.

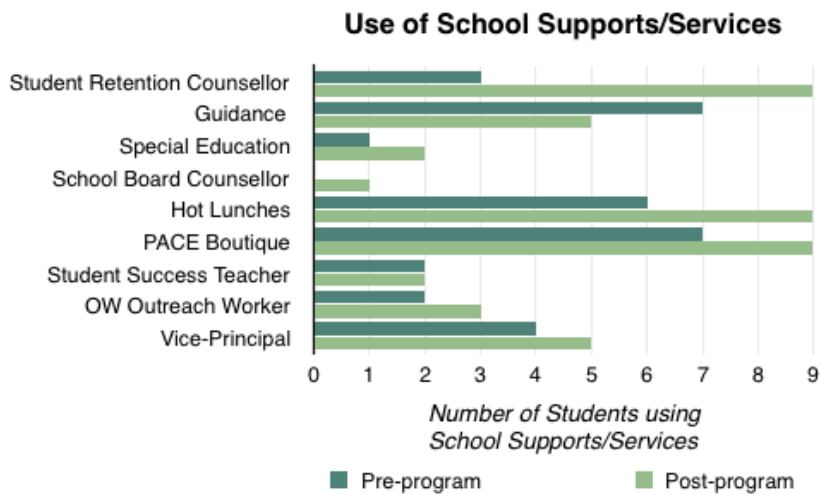


Figure 3: Use of School Supports/Services

The student retention counsellor also indicated an increased connection with program participants, saying, “I got to know them more and more. They would come in for a chat.” The coordinator stated that the program was instrumental in connecting the girls with school; she also noted, “It is amazing to see their success after they have struggled here in the past.”

Community Connections

Participants also became connected to community agencies through the workshop facilitators in the program. As the coordinator noted, “They know that face, and feel like

they can call or go in the door. They know they won't be judged." In contrast to their typical experience as young single mothers, the coordinator indicated that the participants were being complimented by the facilitators, who were saying, "What an amazing group of young women." A program partner commented, "They had access to many different organizations ... all in one place. They didn't have to figure it all out themselves. They learned about the resources in the community: 'If I need this, I can contact them.'" Another stated, "Meeting those people is important. It's hard to walk into an agency, especially for a sensitive topic." The coordinator indicated that the community agency representatives also advocated for the participants, connecting them up with resources and helping them to gain access to the programs that they needed.

The participants stated that they now know more about the community agencies and what programs are available, and that they feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. For example, most of the participants enrolled in the Youth Job Connection program at Employment Planning and Counselling (EPC) for July 2018; they connected with EPC through the program, and some of them went to EPC together to sign up. One commented, "I heard about it before, but I never went down." By becoming familiar with EPC and with the support of her peers, she decided to register. Other participant comments about connecting with community agencies included:

- Before it was hard to seek the proper help. I didn't know who to turn to. Now I feel 1000% more confident and I know where to go.
- They were welcoming, kind, understanding and approachable. They explained what their programs are.
- I would absolutely go to a community agency for help. We made lots of connections in the community.
- I'm more comfortable with going into the agencies now that I know people.
- It opened my eyes to what we have out there.

7.1.2 Skill-Building and Wellness

The other key aspects of the program were skill-building and wellness. The participants gained skills in many areas that were relevant to their lives, both in managing current situations and in moving toward their goals. These skill areas, such as culinary, financial literacy, parenting, and certifications, are detailed below under specific outcomes. As well, many program elements were designed to prevent or reduce stress in the participants' lives and promote wellness. The connections with the coordinator, other participants, the school, and community agencies contributed to stress reduction, as did skill-building. In addition, the program included sessions on mental health, mindfulness, yoga, healthy relationships, and court support. The wellness components are discussed in the sections below under specific outcomes. Participants, staff, and program partners indicated that skill-building and wellness were important elements in aiding participants to achieve their objectives.

7.1.3 Summary

As was anticipated in the program design, the aspects of connectedness, skill-building, and wellness assisted participants in achieving outcomes. All of these aspects worked together to provide participants with the foundation of support to move forward with their education and their pathway plans, and with creating a more positive home environment, as will be demonstrated in the sections on specific outcomes that follow.

7.2 Food Security

Food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as a state in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” (FAO, 2006, June, p.1) Recent research confirms that food insecurity impacts individual health and well-being: “... the experience of hunger leaves an indelible mark on children’s physical and mental health ... Adults in food-insecure households have poorer physical and mental health ...” (Tarasuk, V. et al, 2016). The Enhanced Single Parent Program addressed immediate and longer-term food security. To increase food security immediately, the program provided culinary training, which focused on food that the participants could prepare at home as well as the nutritional and financial literacy aspects of food preparation. As the chef noted,

Now they know that it’s simple to go and make food. It doesn’t have to be fancy. It’s affordable if you make your own food and it’s definitely healthier. You’ll get the right nutrients for yourself and your child. We gave them the cooking skills, talked about budgeting, costing of food materials, and so much more – the social aspect, passing on knowledge to your child, cooking together – that creates a healthy community.

All of the participants indicated that they were using the skills that they learned at home (program target: 80%), and several noted that they didn’t cook at home previously and were now confident in preparing food for their family. Comments included:

- Culinary was my favourite. I learned to cook for my family. I’ve made almost everything at home and really liked it.
- I never cooked before, but now I enjoy it and I can make good food.
- I really liked the cooking, it was more hands-on, how to make healthy meals. I cook a lot in general, but I learned more different ways to make things, and we’ll get a recipe book at the end.
- I really liked the cooking, and I’m using it at home. I did cook before but now I am making things from scratch.
- I only cooked basic food before. I’m using it at home – I’ve cooked a couple of recipes.
- Since we did culinary, I liked it, I like to cook and bake. I didn’t know I liked it that much. It’s satisfying and relaxing.

Other immediate food security supports included the participants taking home food that they prepared in the culinary sessions; several participants noted their appreciation of this extra food for their families. The program also connected participants who had not previously been using these services with food support provided to the school community through hot lunches on Fridays and through the student retention counsellor, who brought food and other essentials from Kawartha Food Share to school. The coordinator indicated that participants used these supplies for their families, and that some were helping to support other family members as well. Participants also received plants for their homes; one participant indicated, “I have a garden and I planted tomatoes, cucumber, and chives. I only had flowers before.”

Finally, the program addressed financial literacy in family management, looking at ways to make the most effective use of their income and to avoid financial pitfalls that would affect their ability to have access to nutritious food. It also connected participants with community resources for immediate assistance with food security, such as the Food Box, gleaning, community gardens, and community kitchens. Participant comments included:

- The community gardens are interesting – there is one down my street.
- I’m going to sign up for the cooking course at Public Health and the Food Box program.
- The Food Box is great since fruits and vegetables are really expensive. I’m going to sign up for that.
- I liked going to the farmer’s market to buy local food.

Participants rated their knowledge and experience in culinary, financial/budgeting, and community food supports before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.⁵ Values ranged from ‘No knowledge or experience’ (0) to ‘Very knowledgeable or experienced’ (3). The following chart displays the average of their ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program. Some participants had experience in the food service industry and one had participated in similar programs in previous years; thus, the average rating of previous knowledge and experience in culinary skills is higher than in other areas.

⁵ *Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data will be collected before the participants begin the program.*

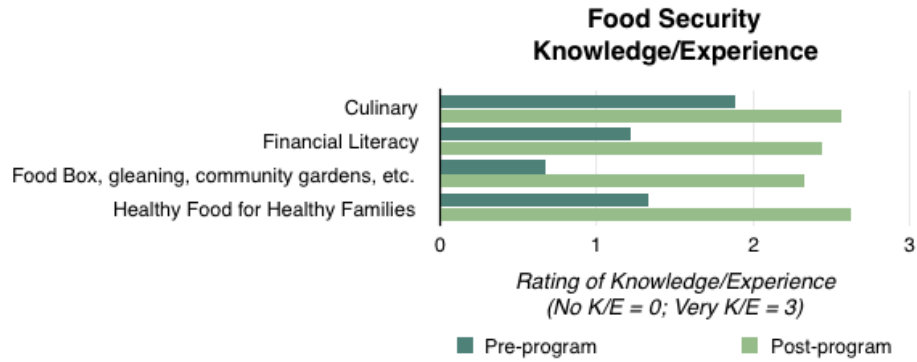


Figure 4: Food Security Knowledge/Experience

7.2.1 Summary

The program’s goal was to increase immediate food security through culinary training and various food supports, as well as financial literacy in family management. Participants met all of the short-term outcomes and three out of four medium-term outcomes related to immediate food security. The evaluation will follow up with participants in six months to determine whether they are accessing food security-related community resources (target: 70% accessing within 6 months of completing the program). Longer-term food security is linked to the self-sufficiency outcome discussed in the next section.

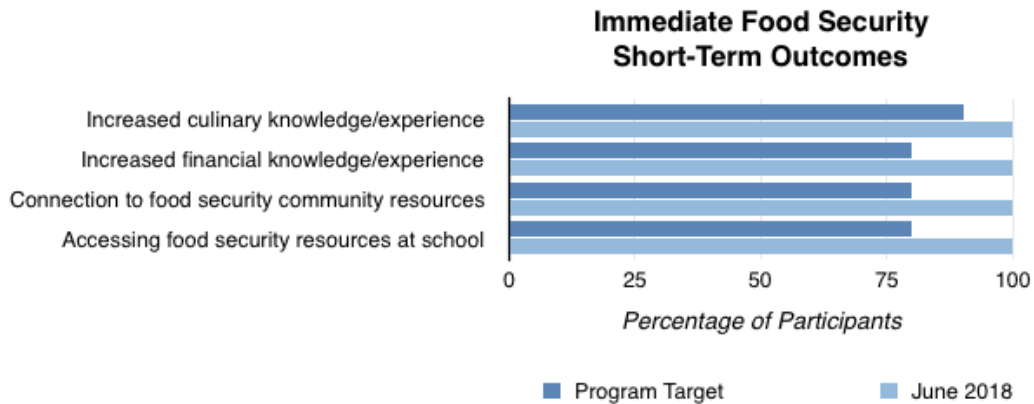


Figure 5: Immediate Food Security: Short-Term Outcomes

7.3 Self-Sufficiency

The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing self-sufficiency through education, training, employment, and connections with relevant community agencies. Participants received assistance with their pathway plan for post-secondary education, training, and employment. All participants reported increased knowledge regarding their chosen pathway, completing a pathway plan, and receiving coaching/mentoring from the coordinator regarding their pathway plan (the program target for each of these was 90%); several reported receiving assistance from the guidance counsellor as well. All participants reported being more prepared to start on their pathway than before the program (target: 90%).

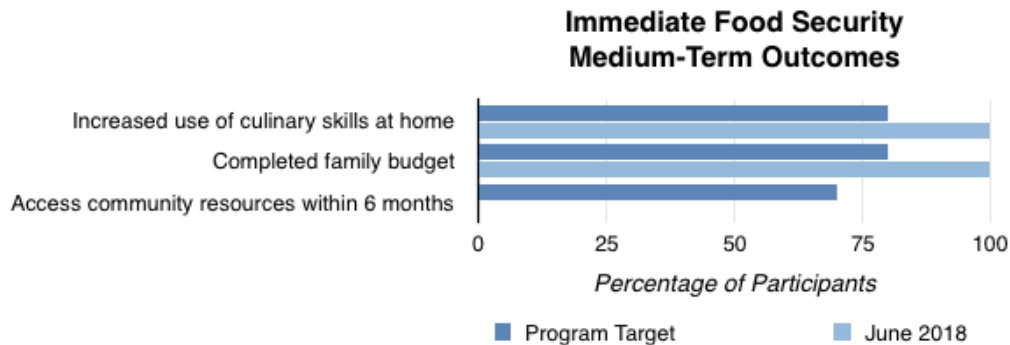


Figure 6: Immediate Food Security: Medium-Term Outcomes

7.3.1 Education

All of the participants were registered at PACE before the program began. Nine out of 11 participants (82%) completed the program (the program target was 90%). For those who completed the program, school staff and participants indicated that it was effective at increasing attendance and engagement.

Attendance

Nine participants completed the program. Three of these participants began on the first day and the others began within the first two weeks. Attendance was calculated for the participants who completed the program based on the first day that they attended. Individual attendance ranged from 68% to 96%, with an average of 81% and a median of 80% (program target: 80%). Five out of nine participants attended 80% or more of the sessions. Participant comments regarding attendance included:

- I feel like this program has helped me with attending every day.
- I definitely come to school more. Sitting in class every day is boring. This is enjoyable, I liked it better, and it made me want to come more.
- Sometimes things are chaotic, and I missed more days than I should have. In the past I had issues with absenteeism.

The coordinator noted that some students had been coming to school regularly before they were involved in the program but were not spending their time in the classroom or were struggling to complete assignments. One was registered at PACE but not attending. Another's attendance was very sporadic before the program, but excellent once she became involved. The guidance counsellor indicated that she noticed a difference in the students' interest in being in class. When they came to see her during their break, she noted, "They wanted to be finished their appointment quickly because they always had something to get back to. They made their appointments outside of class time, which is not the norm here. They came in after 2:00 so that they wouldn't miss class."

Engagement

Research by Reschly, Christenson, and colleagues demonstrated that levels of student engagement can be determined by examining four types of engagement: academic, behavioural, affective, and cognitive. In this evaluation, indicators were selected for each of these types, including credits earned, attendance, participation in class, sense of belonging, relationships with teachers and peers, and perceptions of program relevance.

Participants and school staff concurred that the program was effective in increasing student engagement. Participants noted that the hands-on training was well suited to their learning style and the small group format allowed them to share experiences. Eight out of nine participants (89%) who completed the program reported increased engagement in school (target: 80%). They commented:

- I actually enjoy coming to school. I like the hands-on part. I enjoyed all the stuff we got to do.
- I liked the program a lot more than the big classroom with lots of students where you have to sit and write all the time. I'm a hands-on person. It made me motivated to come to school.
- Definitely this program was a good chance to get back into school. I always liked doing programs that had a schedule and routine to it. I lack dedication and motivation for a self-paced program. This program offered a good mix of structure and lax at times.
- I've been in and out of PACE for 3 years. This is the first time I've stayed in, because of PLAR and this program. I actually wanted to go to school. It's a lot more fun to be in a classroom full of people who you know and you can relate to all of them.
- I've spent 4 years trying to finish school. This is the first time I came to school and stayed. I had more motivation to come, with the certifications and the practical classes.

Other indicators of engagement included participant perceptions of relevance of program content, as well as asking questions in class and participating in class. All participants indicated that they considered the program content to be relevant to them, with one commenting, "It's all stuff you should be having in regular high school. I kept thinking, 'Why didn't anyone teach me this before?'" Participants were also asked to rate themselves on how often they asked questions in class and participated in class before the

program⁶ and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). The pre-program average for asking questions in class was 1.89, with values ranging from 0-3. At the end of the program, the average was 3.44, with values ranging from 3-4. For participation in class, the pre-program average was 2.11, with values ranging from 0-3. Post-program, the participation average was 3.56, with values ranging from 3-4. Values increased for 8 out of 9 participants (89%) for ‘asking questions in class’ and for all participants in ‘participate in class’ (target: 80%).

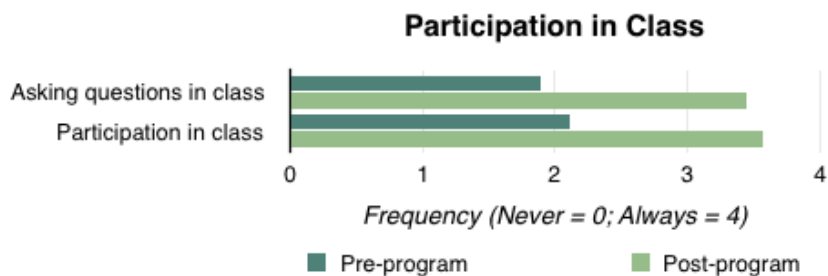


Figure 7: Participation in Class

School staff noted that the varied program content contributed to engagement. The vice-principal indicated that the alternative education setting offers an opportunity for students to work at their own pace and continue on from the point where they left off in school; however, “if the underlying issue [that caused students to stop school] is still present, then it is difficult to complete their education.” He noted, “The 10-week program gives an intensive experience that is very motivating, since there’s always something happening.”

Program partners noted that the program format and the coordinator’s role were key in engaging the participants. Comments included:

- I loved the way [the coordinator] worked with the students, focusing on what their needs were and what they wanted. That resulted in attendance and buy-in from the students. The program nailed the different components – parenting, food – with the combination of ongoing and one-off sessions.
- They were given autonomy and treated like adults, which was empowering for them.
- [The coordinator] did an amazing job. She had their trust, they were engaged, to come back tomorrow. They have enough people coming down on them – they don’t need more hassle. ... She was fabulous, and they really liked her.
- The advantage of this approach is that they are getting things that are not available in the regular classroom. There are hidden obstacles to their success in traditional classrooms and the other kids are judgmental.

⁶ Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data will be collected before the participants begin the program.

- The importance of the program is in the speed with which they complete their goals, which helps to keep on track. It also shows them the softer social side, the skills in negotiating.

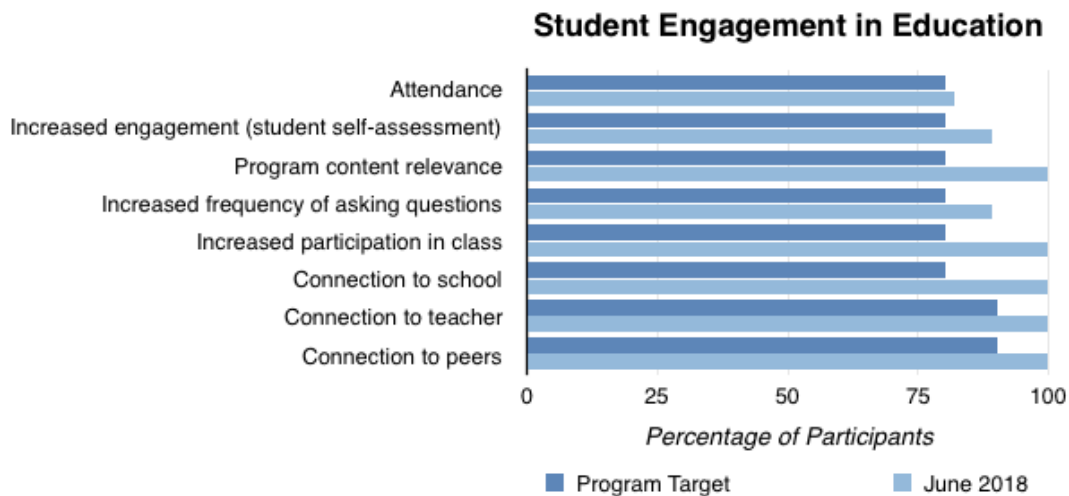


Figure 8: Student Engagement in Education

Challenges in Attendance and Engagement

Participants and school staff identified two major challenges in daily attendance: appointments and changes in their lives outside of school. Several participants had a number of appointments for themselves or their children that affected their attendance. One participant had a major change in her life and missed a week of the program; other issues included changes in housing and in relationships, and sick children. The coordinator indicated that some of the participants notified her when they were unable to attend or were going to arrive late; for others, “There was not always a sense of, ‘If I say I’ll be there, I’ll be there. If not, I’ll let you know.’”

Other challenges noted by school staff and program partners were punctuality and cell phone use during program time. Some participants frequently arrived late and returned late from break time; others were more reliable. Cell phone use during program time was very common. Most interviewees indicated the need to find the balance between a warm, welcoming environment with low barriers to participation and the expectations that participants will face in further education and the working world. Comments included:

- Having to go get them from their breaks was frustrating. It was disrespectful to the presenters who were giving their time. For some of them, their attitude was, ‘We’ll be in eventually.’ They don’t have that sense of responsibility. It got better over time, but still not always there.
- They had a lot of freedom to come and go, but not necessarily a need to come and go. They had free access to electronics. It was a slight frustration – half or more were on their phones. ... It’s not acceptable at a meeting, so why is it acceptable

in this classroom? It's the same with being back at a certain time. Those are life skills.

- There was also an issue with coming back from break on time. It's finding the balance of structure and autonomy.
- Phones are a barrier. We talked about it repeatedly, but I decided I was more worried about having a connection with them. I didn't want to be a disciplinarian.
- They should make their appointments outside of school time. At the same time, we need to be open.
- Let me know if you can't come, like a job. If you don't show up at a job, you're fired. ... You need to earn the credits, like you earn your salary.
- The program offered them a very open concept learning space. There's the balance with boundaries, guidelines, and expectations, aligning with employment. It takes maturity and practice.

Several program delivery partners suggested having a discussion at the beginning of the program to make expectations clear and involve the participants in establishing ground rules around attendance, punctuality, and cell phone use. One program partner noted, "It's difficult with this group to set times and schedules. We discussed ground rules for the sessions and they decided what the rules would be and made a group agreement. As a result, there were not a lot of issues with people being on their phones or showing up on time." For cell phones, suggestions included having short scheduled break times for participants to check their phone and allowing them to leave the phone on in case of emergency (e.g., school or childcare calling) but not use it during program time. One program partner indicated the need to coordinate expectations so that they are consistent in all aspects of the program. Comments included:

- There could be a discussion at the beginning. What are the expectations? What do they want? ... What are the behavioural expectations in society around accountability and respect? What do you need to make this work for you? How can we respect each other? I appreciate the need for freedom.
- I'd like to say, 'This is an opportunity to learn life skills and get a diploma, and to gain insight into the working world. Part of that is being responsible, accountable, dependable, someone who can be relied on. These are the soft skills that you need to have in the world.'
- I would want to have an understanding with the students that I have certain expectations from them and ask them to give it their very best. Maybe we didn't ask them to give their best and if we did, they would be more interested, show more commitment.

The coordinator noted, "They came leaps and bounds from where they started in terms of being on time and engaged. The onus was on them [to be on time]." She indicated, "It's a balance to keep them engaged and yet show them they are perceived as being rude by being late, giving them the skills they need for everyday life. I used a gentle approach, 'Could we be back in 15 minutes?' It got better over time."

Program partners also indicated that they modified their content delivery to adapt to the participants, engaging in dialogue rather than giving a presentation, incorporating more

creative elements, or spending one-on-one time with those who were present while waiting for others to return from break. Several noted that adjustments were required in order to maintain engagement. One mentioned that the coordinator had indicated that a more flexible delivery would improve engagement, so that the partner came prepared for the interaction.

- The challenge was to adapt to the way they interacted with the content and with me, to adapt it to them. It was an opportunity to be flexible, to gear the presentation to them. I tried to engage them a lot, asking them questions.
- The challenges were in getting their attention, sustaining their attention, keeping them focused. As soon as I switched to more creative things, such as colouring while listening, it was easier for them.
- I was more tolerant with them than I normally am ... I thought if I'm too tough, they will resist me, and we won't have fun. ...I can contribute by being a role model, showing them patience, acceptance, communicating, negotiating.

Although the coordinator and almost all program partners expressed some frustration with attendance, tardiness, and cell phone use, most indicated that a balance was required between obtaining and maintaining engagement and meeting the expectations that the participants would experience in employment and future training or education. Some participants were on time and engaged in the sessions. For others, the participants themselves and school staff stated that they were present and engaged in the program more than they had previously been at school; this indication of increased engagement in comparison to past performance demonstrates progress toward these outcomes. There was general agreement that an initial discussion of expectations and soliciting participant input in establishing guidelines would assist in balancing the needs of all parties.

Credit Acquisition

The skills and experience acquired through the training sessions and workshops contributed to credit acquisition; all participants who completed the program earned three credits through the program, with one participant earning four credits (target: 80% earning 3 credits). As well, three participants earned an additional credit in parallel to the program, and one participant earned two additional credits. Several participants indicated that for students who complete most of their OSSD at PACE, there are limited options for electives, and they appreciated the possibility of obtaining elective credits through the program. Participant comments on credit acquisition included:

- I joined PACE two months before. In the normal classroom, it was boring, and I did one credit in a couple of months. In this program, I got Smart Serve and other certifications and three credits in 10 weeks. I felt more part of PACE.
- I registered at PACE a couple of years ago but in this school where you have to be self-driven I never completed anything. ... I needed four credits in day school and I get three credits for this program. I'll be finishing [the final credit] in the next week.
- It took me a long time to get a credit [in the past]. This course gave me three credits in 10 weeks. I wasn't expecting it to have such an impact.

- Without this program, I might have given up on school. ... I was struggling with school. This program made it easier.
- This program helps single moms get schooling. It's hard to go to school with a baby or a toddler. For a single parent, it's even harder.

Graduation

All but one of the participants who completed the program were within five credits of completing their OSSD; several were also finishing their portfolios for senior PLAR. Of the eight participants who were close to completing their OSSD, seven finished their remaining requirements through the program or in parallel to it and graduated in June 2018. The target for the program is an 80% graduation rate within one year of program completion; the participants in the first delivery block attained a 78% graduation rate at program completion. The evaluation will follow up with the two remaining participants at the end of the second delivery block to determine graduation rate at six months after program completion. Participants and school staff had the following comments regarding graduation:

- A lot of us girls didn't think we'd graduate. [The coordinator] stayed after school and helped us with our credits. This gave me three credits and [the coordinator] said, 'We can work on the other credits.' I'm going to be graduating at the end of this year. I didn't think it would happen.
- I'm excited and happy that I'm graduating. I'm only a year behind [my class] and with a child. When I started I had 26 credits to go. I thought it would take forever.
- I didn't think I would ever graduate. My parents weren't supportive. Now I'm accepted into college for September.
- I'm finally going to graduate. I dropped out at 16.
- I wouldn't be graduating this year without the program.
- I'm going to graduate. I'm excited – it's finally happening.
- She's the first to graduate in her family.

Participants and school staff attributed the high graduation rate to the momentum created through the program. One school staff member commented, "They worked quickly through their credits and some were able to use what they did in the program to complete their portfolios for senior PLAR so they could graduate. Being part of the program really did give them more drive to finish. It made them see that they could graduate."

Enrolment in Additional Courses

The two participants who did not graduate in June 2018 both indicated that they were enrolled in additional courses for the following semester (target: 90% of those who had not completed OSSD). One participant had two credits remaining, and the other was working toward the completion of PLAR and a final credit. One participant who graduated also registered to upgrade a course in preparation for college. Comments from the participants and the coordinator included:

- I finished PLAR before the program and I have two credits to go, so I'll be back in the fall. It's exciting to be so close to graduating.
- Next, I have senior PLAR. I need to do a portfolio and then need one more credit after. I'm coming back in September.
- She got three credits through the program and was looking ahead, 'What else do I need?' She talked to the others about PLAR and said, 'OK I just have to do this.' She watched the others do their senior PLAR portfolio. She took a lot out of her involvement with the program.

Post-Secondary Education

Two of the participants were accepted into college at the end of the program. The coordinator noted, "Academically, most are very strong. I said, 'You need to just go to college,' to challenge them to take the next step." Others were planning to work first and apply to post-secondary later, and some were not planning to engage in post-secondary education. The two participants who had not yet finished their OSSD plan to attend college once they complete their final credits. Comments included:

- I applied to business and accounting at Fleming for September and got accepted. I knew what I wanted to do and I talked to [the coordinator] about it. She said it's OK to go in and if I don't like it, I can change courses. It's OK if it doesn't work out. It made me think I'd give it a try.
- I'm considering funeral direction. Until I have a solid plan, I need to get a job.
- A lot of people came in who were involved in different aspects of community service, so that gave me ideas on what career path I'd like to take and what college courses I could do. I want to help others in the community because I needed help and I understand them.
- I'm looking into three or four college courses – addictions counsellor, community service.
- I'm accepted into college for September in child and youth care. I want to help kids who are going through difficult times. It helped to have different people come in and give different ideas.
- I can't afford college right now, and I'm not really interested.
- I want to go to college. ... I don't want to jump in right away. I want to do something I will actually pursue. I have all the requirements, all the credits so whatever I choose I can do.
- In January I want to start the Paramedic program at Fleming. Having the First Aid and CPR will help me with that.
- My plan is to go to college for ECE.

Six participants went on the field trip to Toronto to see the culinary program facilities at George Brown College, which was a highlight of the program for those participants. They indicated that touring the college gave them a better understanding of what this type of college program entailed. The chef noted, "I was very happy to introduce them to Toronto, take them to the college. It's a different world out there. See how the students are dressed – if they don't have the right shoes, or they have a dirty jacket, they aren't

allowed in class, or they lose marks. We only have them for a short time – 10 weeks – to give them some idea of what’s out there.”

7.3.2 Training/Certifications

The participants received 19 days of culinary skills training delivered by a professional chef. These culinary skills focused on food preparation, nutrition, cleanliness, and safety. The average attendance rate for the culinary training was 78%, ranging from 44% to 100% with a median of 84% (target: 80%). Participants received an additional 1.5 days of culinary training through PPH and Nourish. Participants commented:

- I liked trying new things. I knew some of the techniques, but I learned other techniques like holding knives properly – [the chef] was very big on safety first. That was great – I brought it home and taught [my child]. [My child] wants to help in the kitchen. I also tried new ingredients.
- I haven’t tried the recipes at home, but I use the techniques, like how to dice an onion. My former partner was a picky eater so that limited what kind of recipes I could make. [My child] is more adventurous and loved the food I brought home from the course.
- Culinary was my favourite part. I knew how to cook already but I liked learning to cook so many different things. I’m using the techniques at home.
- I really liked the cooking. I learned things I didn’t know before, like how to hold knives and proper techniques.

All participants reported an increase in their knowledge about the requirements for working in a culinary job (target: 80%). Participant comments included:

- The course helped me be better prepared if I do want a culinary job. I learned the terms and how to do certain things.
- I knew a lot about culinary work beforehand since I worked in it before.
- The program has helped me to feel more comfortable working with food. With the certifications we got, I could go work in the food industry.
- I’m better prepared to work in a culinary job. I’m not scared to do it. I’ve had three different chefs [in three years of participating in the program] so I learned different ways to do things and we cooked different things with each one.

Participants had the opportunity to earn a number of employment-related certifications through the program: Smart Serve, Food Handlers, First Aid, and Customer Service and Point of Sale training. Three participants already had their Food Handlers certification; the other six completed theirs in the program. Two participants already had Smart Serve certification, and six more received it through the program (89%). Eight received First Aid certification (89%), and six received the Customer Service/Point of Sale training (67%). The program target was an 80% completion rate per certification. Participants noted that the certifications were a motivation for joining the program and could be useful in certain post-secondary programs as well as in employment. School staff indicated that participants were proud of the certifications that they earned. Comments from participants and school staff included:

- I'm not necessarily planning to work in this area, but the Food Handlers is good not just for fast food places, it could be for a career in hospitality or at a nursing home. I think it makes you a more valuable employee if you can fill in where needed. It's good for preparing food at home too. I know more about food handling now.
- It's amazing – I didn't think I would ever get that certification [First Aid]. It's a big help in trying to get jobs.
- I appreciated the extra training – the First Aid, Smart Serve, Safe Food Handling, and Point of Sale. Most of the time you would have to pay for these, so that removed a barrier.
- I was excited to get the certifications, because they are really helpful for work.
- I am glad we are doing the Point of Sale training. Some have had it before, but it's good experience.
- When we did Point of Sale training, [one of the students] said, "I could do this. I could be a waitress."

7.3.3 Employment

A resume building session was held at the very end of the program and demonstrated the options for presentation of skills and experience. Seven out of nine participants (78%) took part in the Resume Building workshop (target: 80%). One of the participants who missed the workshop already had a resume. Even the participants without work experience were able to prepare a resume based on the skills they gained through the program. The facilitator indicated, "The program allowed them to get the building blocks in place for resume writing. Doing the resume at the end was good timing. ... They gained so much confidence and competencies – they didn't realize how much until they did their resumes." Participant interviews were conducted before this final session was completed, and so no specific feedback on the session was gathered from them; however, a number of participants indicated that they were anticipating the session and eager to have a completed resume to move forward with their job search.

Two of the participants were working part-time at the onset of the program; however, for various reasons, both left their jobs during the program. Several of the participants planned to enter the workforce after the program finished, and others planned to work until they started post-secondary education. One participant noted, "I'm going to be taking a year off, with my new baby." Comments regarding employment included:

- I am thinking about working in a culinary job. I like cooking at home, and I could fall back on that.
- I feel a lot more prepared to look for an actually good job instead of stocking shelves.
- This program will really help with things for my resume and I can use the experience I gained here.
- I'm trying to get a job over the summer.
- After [graduation] I'm going to start working to get some money, move into a better place. I think I'll work a bit less than a year and then work part-time in college. I only worked once before, and I want to get more work experience.

Two participants indicated an interest in self-employment; both had skills that would lend themselves to starting their own businesses. One had training and experience in her chosen field and noted that she planned to hire other program participants once her business was underway. The other planned to find a position assisting an established business to gain experience before starting her own business. She stated, “I’ll slowly but surely get into it myself.”

Finally, seven out of nine participants (78%) were connected or planning to connect with the EPC to assist them in their job search (target: 70%), most through the Youth Job Connection program that offers paid training as well as work placements. Several had used the EPC’s services in the past, and some had only become familiar with the EPC through the program. Seven out of nine participants (78%) reported increased engagement in pursuing their pathway and were implementing the initial steps of their pathway plan (target: 80%). As mentioned above, one participant was planning to take time with her newborn before initiating her pathway plan steps. Comments by the program partner, the participants, and the coordinator included:

- They’ve taken hold of the seriousness of it. I was so proud to see one young lady say, “I have a job, but I really hate it,” and she applied to the youth program.
- I have a plan to go for the Job Search program at EPC. They have a placement part where they do job matching.
- I’m going to EPC in July to do the Youth Job Connection program to help find work. They will help to find us a placement where we feel comfortable. I did the Jobs for Youth program at EPC before and the coordinator is great.
- The other girls are doing Job Connect but I would need daycare. I may be doing that training.
- A couple of us are doing [the Youth Job Connects program] together. Maybe we’ll have our placement in the same spot. I want to be placed [to have help finding a job]. ...I’ve never done anything with EPC before.
- I’m going to EPC now. I went through EPC before and I really like them.
- I have done things through EPC before and knew they were cool. I’m going to Youth Job Connect this summer.
- EPC was a good connection for her to make. She wouldn’t have done the summer EPC program without this program.

Participants rated their knowledge and experience in certifications and resume-building before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.⁷ (Ratings for culinary-related topics are included above in Section 7.2 on Food Security). Values ranged from ‘No knowledge or experience’ (0) to ‘Very knowledgeable or experienced’ (3). The following chart displays the average of their ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program. As noted above, some participants had completed certifications in the past and/or had already prepared a resume.

⁷ *Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data will be collected before the participants begin the program.*

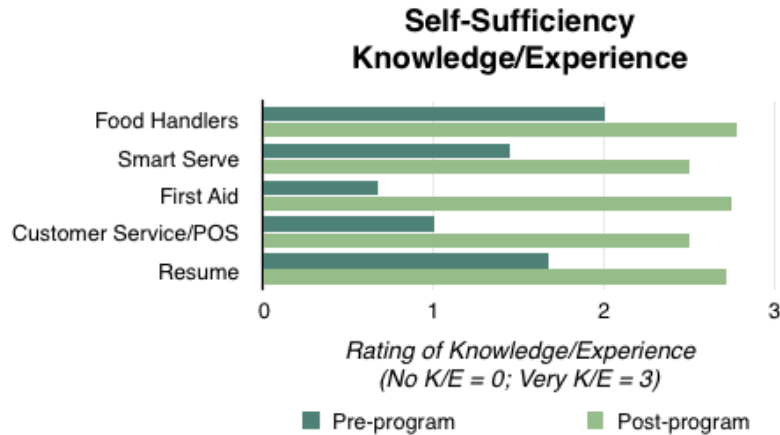


Figure 9: Self-Sufficiency Knowledge/Experience

7.3.4 Summary

The program's goal was to increase longer-term food security and self-sufficiency through education, training, and employment. For the education component of the program, most participants had met the short and medium-term outcomes of the program, and seven out of nine had completed the long-term outcome of obtaining their OSSD, with the remaining two enrolled in further high school courses for the next semester. The evaluation will follow up with them at the end of the second delivery block to determine graduation rate at six months after program completion (program target: 80% graduation rate within one year of completing the program). Similarly, for the career pathway component, most participants had met the program's short and medium-term outcomes. The evaluation will follow up with participants in six months to determine their progress in meeting the long-term outcome of becoming engaged in post-secondary education, employment, or training (target: 80% engaged in EET within six months of completing their OSSD).

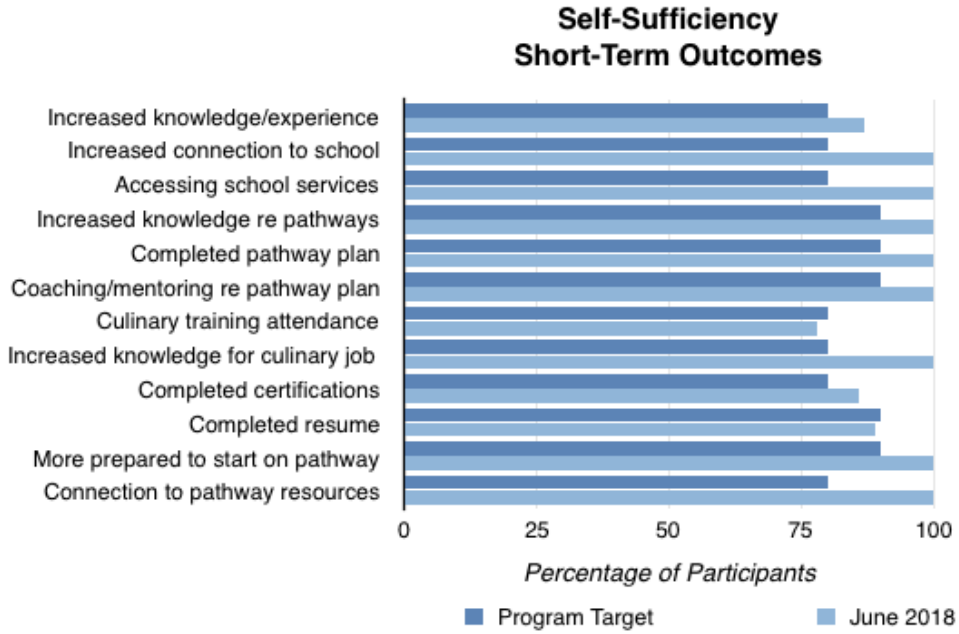


Figure 10: Self-Sufficiency Short-Term Outcomes

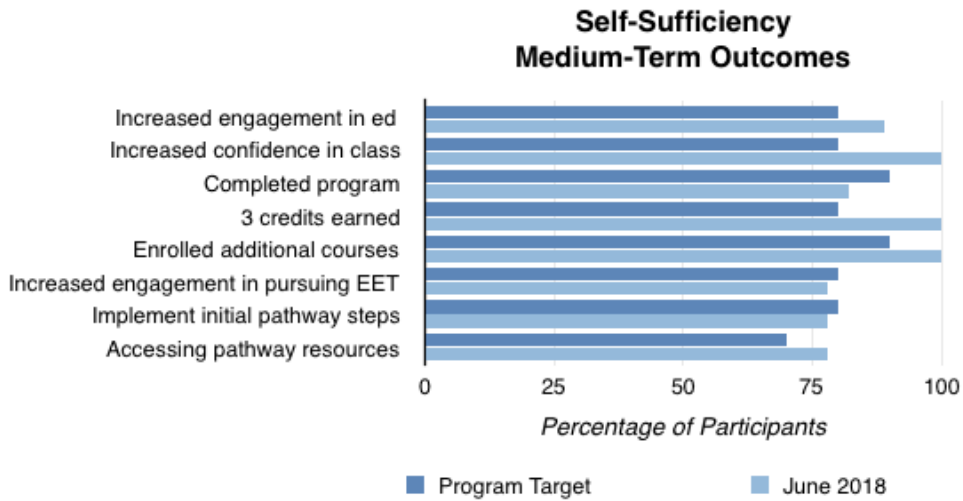


Figure 11: Self-Sufficiency Medium-Term Outcomes

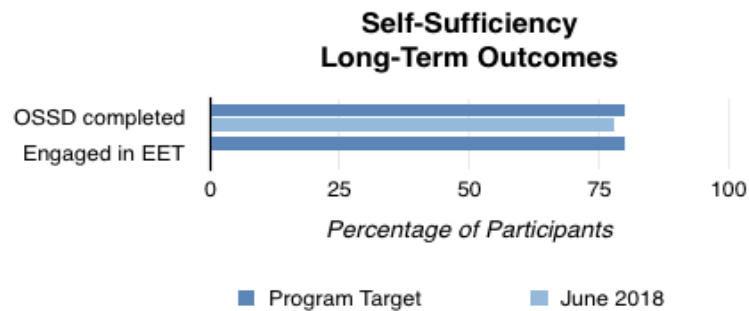


Figure 12: Self-Sufficiency Long-Term Outcomes

7.4 Resilience

Resilience has been a focus of research for decades, given its role in health and the management of challenges across the lifespan. (Windle, 2010) Many definitions of resilience as well as approaches to measuring it have been proposed. This evaluation adopts the definition proposed by Windle through an extensive review of the literature and concept analysis of resilience research: "... resilience is defined as the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity." (1) Windle concludes that interventions designed to increase resilience may address the context in which people live, services and treatments they receive, and enhancement of individual assets to enable a better chance for health and well-being, even when faced with substantial risk and adversity. (14) Windle cites A. Sacker in a personal communication giving examples of the layers of resources and assets that facilitate resilience, including individual development (temperament, aptitudes, biology, motivation, behaviour), family and household (cohesion, support, stability, finances, housing), neighbourhood and social context (work, social networks, services, transport, environment, schools) and social policies. (7) Recent research by Rossouw and Rossouw integrating health factors (exercise, nutrition, sleep) suggest that these are also predictive of resilience (Rossouw et al, 2016). The evaluation examined the contribution of the program to assisting participants in increasing resilience through addressing aspects of individual development, family and household, social context, and health. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was selected to provide evidence of pre-program and post-program levels of resilience.

7.4.1 Individual Development

The program addressed two aspects of individual development: confidence and self-advocacy.

Confidence

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that the participants' confidence levels increased during the program. Participants rated themselves on how often they felt

confident before the program⁸ and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). The average level of confidence before the program was 1.56, with values ranging from 0-3 and a median of 2. At the end of the program, the average was 3.22, with values ranging from 2-4 and a median of 3. Values increased for all participants (target: 80%). School staff, program partners, and participants offered the following comments:

- They were learning from their different classes, incorporating self-care and acknowledging that is an important part of parenting, taking time for self. They showed confidence and were comfortable in saying, ‘This is my life,’ learning about brushing off pressures and expectations to conform to unrealistic standards. ‘I’ll find my own way.’ It creates healthy self-esteem.
- I saw them becoming more confident over time.
- Some of them were the students who were wandering the hallways or staying in the shadows at school. It’s a miracle that it all came together for them. Their self-confidence increased so much, they almost ran the school.
- It was great to see the girls at work together, not competing, to see how they made friends and became closer. They really have matured. They are now sure of themselves.
- I feel like I’ve grown a bit more, I’m more confident. Learning skills like cooking and parenting gives you the support and information that you need and didn’t get from regular school. I use it all at home, a lot of the skills.
- I’m more confident. If I need help, I know what’s out there.

Self-Advocacy

Participants, school staff, and program partners indicated that the participants’ self-advocacy levels increased during the program. Participants were asked to rate themselves on how often they “advocate for what I need or want” before the program and at the end of the program: Never (0), Rarely (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) or Always (4). The average level of self-advocacy before the program was 1.56, with values ranging from 0-3 and a median of 2. At the end of the program, the average was 3.22, with values ranging from 2-4 and a median of 3. Values increased for all participants (target: 80%). School staff, program partners, and participants commented:

- At the beginning, she felt like she wasn’t heard in the group, would wait for a turn to ask questions. Then she started to have the confidence to ask her questions.
- I saw big gains in self-advocacy and confidence and resilience.
- She’s a very good self-advocate. When her child was born, she proactively settled all the custody arrangements.
- She doesn’t believe in herself, but she will stand up for anyone else. She needs to learn self-advocacy, to ask for what she needs.
- When talking with the court support, she knew exactly what she wanted – she was very specific, “I want this, and I don’t want that.”

⁸ *Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data will be collected before the participants begin the program.*

- She missed the OSAP presentation but looked into it herself and did [the application process]. She called Fleming and asked, “What do I need?”
- She came a long way in confidence and self-advocacy.
- I was not one to ask questions. Seeing everyone asking questions and talking about themselves, being open and not judgmental, helped a lot with my anxiety.

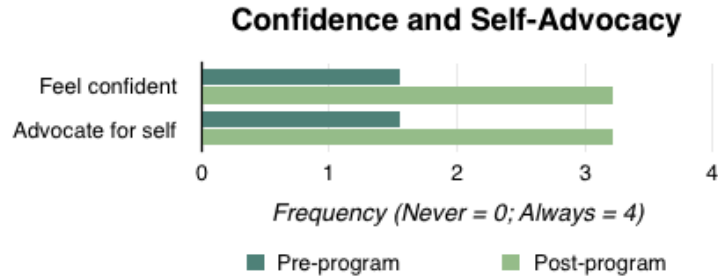


Figure 13: Confidence and Advocacy

7.4.2 Family and Household

The program addressed a number of aspects of family and household, including food security, parenting, finances, relationships, and court support.

Food Security

Immediate food security was increased through culinary training, food supports at school, food/plants to take home, and connecting with community resources for immediate assistance, as discussed above in Section 7.2. Longer-term food security was addressed through education, training, and employment supports, as discussed in Section 7.3.

Parenting

The ‘Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting’ course was designed to increase parenting skills based on the principles of child development and effective parenting. The participants received a parenting certification from the course, which could support them if they were involved with the Children’s Aid Society or at court. The facilitator noted, “I told them, ‘I’m a better parent every time I deliver this course. We can all use this as parents.’” The participants demonstrated increased skills over the course of the seven sessions; the program partner indicated, “I could see the change in the mindset of the moms from week to week. In the first parenting sessions, I heard, ‘I’ve tried that – it doesn’t work.’ Over time their mindset changed, they tried the techniques, and I started to hear, ‘For the first time, my kid did this, or didn’t do that.’” All of the participants indicated that they were implementing the techniques they learned in the parenting course (target: 80%). Participants and the coordinator stated that their level of stress around parenting had decreased and the effectiveness of their parenting interactions had increased. Comments included:

- I noticed over time that her questions about parenting were changing. She wasn’t having the same struggles.

- The parenting class really helped, looking at 0-7 years and how they cope. It taught us to think about how we would feel at that age to understand how our children feel. It gave us different ways to deal with our children, such as taking a breath.
- I liked the positive parenting and I'm using it at home. I'm calmer and I understand my child better. I understand the child's brain and how it's not fully developed.
- The parenting, positive discipline, helps to remember to be calm. They taught about understanding why your child's upset. Maybe they need to talk, they need a hug. [My child] gets upset easily and then you get upset. [My child] starts to scream and cry. Now I can compromise with [my child].
- I have used some of the stuff from the parenting program. I'm not consistent but I'm trying.
- I do a lot of the stuff already for parenting, staying calm. I learned how to handle [my child] and keep [my child] calm.
- The parenting tips are really helpful. I get frustrated and I didn't know ways to deal with it. It was difficult at home with [my child], but [my child] is really liking the new aspects of parenting that I learned. It's easier to deal with tantrums.
- At home, I'm using the positive discipline. When [my child] isn't listening, I put myself in [my child]'s position and think, "How is [my child] feeling?" Then we talk about it and spend a few minutes together before we move on to whatever we were doing.

Finances

Sound management of the available resources and knowing how to avoid financial pitfalls make an important contribution to lowering stress and improving food security as well as housing security. The focus of the financial literacy sessions was on covering the key aspects needed to manage their finances and navigate potential pitfalls as well as on answering participant questions regarding financial matters. The sessions were delivered by two organizations. One of the program partners noted, "We talked a lot about self-advocacy and how to read between the lines. I talked about having an understanding that finances are constantly changing and we all need to ask questions. ... Most of us struggle with money at some time in our lives." The other program partner indicated, "It was a lot of life-skills talk. They had questions, and it was a cross-table dialogue with everyone participating." Both facilitators noted that more time would be needed to allow fuller discussions and cover basic finances in sufficient detail. Most participants stated that the discussion of budgeting was particularly helpful, although a few indicated that they were already adept at budgeting.

In the evaluation of the financial literacy sessions conducted by CCRC, participants indicated that they liked best: "learning about interest, credit (2 responses), budgeting (3 responses), work with money on payday, ask questions [as a consumer], financial evaluation." Their feedback on "one idea I might try" was: "being careful with rent to own, checking my credit rating and score (2 responses), getting my credit rating better,

not getting payday loans, getting a savings account, careful getting a credit card, budgeting, visiting the links provided to learn more, planning out what I have to pay every month.” These responses indicate an increased understanding of financial management and potential pitfalls.

All of the participants developed a household budget (target: 90%) and indicated that they were implementing the financial practices that were presented in the workshops or that they were already adept at financial management (target: 80%). Comments from the coordinator and the participants included:

- She liked the budgeting workshop. She had a plan and was putting money aside.
- Financing class really helped with budgeting and how to save money. [The facilitator] let us sit and discuss the information – she was patient and interested in what we had to say.
- It helped to make a plan during financing class. I realized what I could afford. ... The budgeting class showed me how I can make smarter choices and put money aside each month for the kids.
- The financial information was helpful and is useful at home. I liked the envelope system.
- For budgeting, I already had some tricks, but I liked some of the ideas from the presenters and will try them.
- For the budgeting, I was good at that already. I learned how to do it at high school.
- The financial advice was a really good aspect and helped me think about budgeting for college.

Longer-term financial stability was supported through the interventions in education, training, and employment supports, as outlined in Section 7.3.

Healthy Relationships

The participants indicated that the session on healthy relationships was very helpful and appreciated learning about the resources available at KSAC. One participant noted that the discussion brought more clarity about what constituted an abusive relationship, and another indicated that the participants have experienced unhealthy relationships. The facilitator stated, “The discussion was one of learning together – they are the experts in their own experience – and acknowledging their resilience, how strong they were. They created a welcoming, inclusive space, a non-judgmental space.” The facilitator noted, “I was very moved by how they were so willing to share, the strength they exhibited.” The coordinator stated, “The presentation from KSAC opened up some really important discussions.” She indicated that the discussions gave an opportunity for sharing, with participants stating their perspective, “I wouldn’t put up with that.” Some participants indicated that they made important changes in their relationships with partners as a result of these discussions. Other comments included:

- The sexual assault clinic presentation [on healthy relationships] was very helpful. ... People were asking questions and know what to look for and where to go to

seek help. You need to feel comfortable. [The facilitator] was like a friend and she said we could ask for her specifically.

- We talked about relationships – what is healthy and what is not healthy. For [a former partner] who was interested in getting back together, she decided, “I don’t have to accept him back into my life.”

Court Support

Some of the participants were involved with family court; another aspect of support for family and household issues was with navigating the family court system. The Court Support group from the YWCA gave a presentation about their services and answered questions. The coordinator noted that the YW provides many other programs, including a walk-in clinic that connects women with a broad range of community services, and the YW facilitators indicated, “Anything they need, send them to us.” She stated that the participants asked detailed questions about their family court issues and realized that they can receive assistance with navigating the system. The facilitator noted, “They got information they needed, and they know we’re here. ...They had as much to tell us as we had to tell them.” Participant comments included:

- The legal group were really great, amazing and forthcoming with information, wanting to help.
- I think the YWCA should come in to all of the classes. We learned a lot of information from them.
- The court support one was helpful. There was lots I didn’t know, and we had questions.
- The court program was good. If we needed to ask questions they were very helpful. I feel comfortable going to see them.

7.4.3 Social Context

Participants, school staff, and program partners concurred that one of the strengths of the program was in increasing the community of support available to the participants. This community of support involved the program coordinator, other participants, school staff, and community agencies, as presented in Section 7.1.1. All participants reported coaching/mentoring from the coordinator regarding their personal/family life (target: 90%) and an increased sense of connection with each other (target: 90%), as well as increased knowledge of and connection to community agencies (target: 80%). This community of support aided in dealing with challenges. Participant and facilitator comments included:

- [The coordinator] is providing great mentorship and a role model. She really related to them and was down to earth. They are comfortable with her and talked with her about their personal issues. Young moms need a good solid role model to let them know they are doing well.
- The most important parts of the program are building relationships and creating a supportive community, not feeling alone. Getting to know the services and agencies that are available locally, especially for crisis-type situations.

- Through all the programs, we met so many different people. Everyone has so much faith in you here, and they push you to do better things.

All of the participants indicated support for each other (target: 80%). As the participants move into post-secondary education, training, and employment, their community of support may change. The evaluation will follow up with them after the second delivery block to determine if they have maintained a community of support through these transitions, and if they are accessing personal/family life-related community resources (target: 70% of participants accessing within 6 months of program completion).

7.4.4 Health

The research by Rossouw et al focused on the relationship of physiological health, including regular exercise, nutrition, and sleep, to resilience (2016). The evaluation has also included mental health in this category because of the well-recognized links between mental health and resilience (Friedli, 2009). The major health interventions of the program included food security, nutrition, mental health supports, and mindfulness and yoga sessions. All participants stated that they were implementing the wellness strategies that they had learned in the program (target: 80%).

Food Security and Nutrition

As discussed above, food security is essential to physical and mental health. In addition to increasing food security, the culinary training focused on nutrition in the sessions provided by the chef as well as those from Peterborough Public Health and Nourish. Participant and school staff comments included:

- It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food.
- The girls would bring me a plate of food that they had made, and they explained exactly how they made it from scratch, and it tasted amazing.
- They could explain each of the dishes they made, with something from every food group. They were so proud to say, “I made this.” They made things I would have never tried otherwise – such a variety of things they learned to make.

Mental Health

A number of the participants indicated that they were dealing with mental health challenges. Three sessions were focused on mental health: the first was a discussion of the programs and services at the CMHA, the second was on Mental Health 101, and the final session was on stress management. The facilitator indicated, “They were able to talk about what was going on in their lives. They talked about mental health challenges and found out that others experienced them too, they were not alone. . . . Some left with an idea of who they could call if they needed help: the crisis line, the CMHA.” She noted that the safe environment created in the program contributed to the effectiveness of the sessions, stating, “They were really open in talking about mental health issues. In our society we still have to break down that stigma and this was a safe space to do that.” Participants commented that it was very helpful to find out about the programs and services at the CMHA; the coordinator noted that the participants were very engaged in

the Mental Health 101 discussion, and some were planning to follow up with specific programs or services. The discussions allowed participants to share their experiences and to support each other.

Mindfulness and Yoga

One facilitator provided both the mindfulness and yoga sessions, with 10 sessions in total. The facilitator and the coordinator indicated that many of the participants had preconceptions about yoga that caused them not to be interested in participating in those sessions. A possible approach in the next delivery block would be to rename the yoga sessions to avoid these preconceptions. All of the participants stated that the mindfulness sessions were very beneficial. As the program partner noted, “It helps in working through past stuff – how can you work on budgeting when you’re having a panic attack, or thinking about a fight with your boyfriend?” She indicated, “They are carrying so much with them. We had a conversation that turned into a discussion of the abuse they had been through. Family of origin stuff kept coming up. This is heavy stuff they are dealing with.” The facilitator used a varied approach and incorporated creative elements such as colouring. She noted, “I also did some things that they could do with their children, showing them how they could use the same techniques, but a 2-year-old version.” Participants indicated that the mindfulness techniques and breathing were very effective for them in reducing anxiety and stress. Comments included:

- The material was very relevant, especially the mindfulness and yoga. I have social anxiety and the breathing techniques really helped and I learned other ways to cope.
- I liked the mindfulness and I use it at home. When I’m having a rough time, I know what to do. I got to learn about breathing.
- The mindfulness was really helpful, to help me deal with my child’s freak-outs, learning different ways to calm my child. I’m using it at home. It helps to deal with anxiety, especially the breathing techniques.
- I use mindfulness a lot. The mindfulness was really nice, to take that time for yourself, even if it’s 10 minutes of being calm. I’m using that outside of class.
- I am more calm, more aware of my mood, less anxiety.
- I use mindfulness a lot. I would like to do yoga with [my child] when [my child] is older.
- I make more time for myself. I learned that it’s important to make yourself feel better.
- I use the mindfulness sometimes to keep myself calm.
- The mindfulness and yoga give you a way to figure out how to deal with yourself.

Participants rated their knowledge and experience in parenting, healthy relationships, court support, mental health, mindfulness, and yoga before their participation in the program and at the end of the program.⁹ (Ratings for food security and nutrition are presented above in Section 7.2). Values ranged from ‘No knowledge or experience’ (0)

⁹ *Note: the pre-program rating was estimated by participants on the post-program questionnaire, since no pre-program data was collected by the evaluation for this delivery block. In the second delivery block, this data will be collected before the participants begin the program.*

to ‘Very knowledgeable or experienced’ (3). The following chart displays the average of their ratings of knowledge and experience pre- and post-program.



Figure 14: Resilience Knowledge/Experience

7.4.5 Resilient Behaviours and Attitudes

Participants and school staff gave examples of resilient behaviours and attitudes in response to challenges. They also indicated that the program helped the participants to gain momentum in moving forward on their goals despite challenges. Examples of resilient behaviours and attitudes, as well as the momentum generated by participation in the program, included:

- [For a participant who is “terrified of tests”] Smart Serve was a big challenge for her. She was the only one who didn’t pass the first time. She asked at EPC if they offered another time to write it and then came and told me, “I booked my time. Will you come with me?” In the end, EPC wouldn’t allow me to accompany her in the room, but [another participant] went and sat in the waiting room while she wrote the test. It was a huge thing for her to do it on her own.
- The mindfulness and the parenting are helping me to face challenges in my life.
- [My child] has been in full-time daycare since January and I found that I wasn’t doing something with my days. This program gave me a purpose and motivation. I feel like I’ve been doing something with my time.
- I think it has made a difference [in facing challenges]. I’m definitely more open to new things instead of closed off. I feel better about taking chances and I’m interested in new things.
- I’m more motivated than before, knowing I am getting this done and have all this help along the way. It’s very encouraging.
- I’m good at facing challenges.
- I’ve been using some techniques to help me face challenges and they’ve helped. It’s been a confidence boost to have the satisfaction of accomplishing something.

- I don't think I would have been able to [make a major life change] without the program.
- Some of the students are going to college. That would have never happened without the program. They needed help to get momentum, to go beyond smoking with their friends.
- The girls are pushing each other to finish and graduate this year. They have created a wave of their own group who face the same challenges.

7.4.6 CD-RISC Scale

The 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10) was administered to the participants at the end of the first delivery block. The CD-RISC was one of three resilience scales to receive the best psychometric ratings in Windle, Bennett and Noyes' extensive methodological review of resilience measurement scales (Windle et al, 2011). Scores on the CD-RISC are generally lower in those with psychiatric problems and those who are having difficulty coping with stress. However, scores are also generally lower in younger adults, such as students, who may score lower than older adults, and therefore results obtained with Canadian and US students are included in this report for comparison. No studies with young single mothers were reported in the CD-RISC manual (Davidson et al, 2018).

For the CD-RISC-10, the total score ranges from 0-40. In the general US population, the mean score was 31.8, with a median score of 32 (SD = 5.4); lowest to highest quartiles were 0-29, 30-32, 33-36 and 37-40. A study with Canadian psychology students found a mean score of 28.0 and one with Canadian medical female and male students found a mean score of 28.8 among female medical students and 31.2 among male medical students. A mean of 27.2 was found with US college undergraduates and a mean of 30.1 was found with a normative US student sample. In Canadian primary care patients with depression, suicide attempts, or suicidality, mean scores were 22.3 for depressed patients compared with 31.0 for non-depressed patients. Subjects in a US student counseling clinic sample had a mean of 19.6, and those in a Canadian sample of patients with high anxiety had a mean of 24.7 compared to those without high anxiety at 31.4 (Davidson et al, 2018).

A mean score of 25.6 was obtained with the participants at the end of the first delivery block, with a median of 26. Individual scores ranged from 18-33. Most of the individual scores were observed to correlate with qualitative data gathered from interviews with participants and the coordinator. Interpretation of these scores will be conducted at the end of the second delivery block, since baseline and final values will be collected for the second cohort, allowing for interpretation in this population.

7.4.7 Summary

The program incorporated a number of elements designed to lower stress and increase the personal, household, and community resources available to participants to deal with

challenging situations. For the personal/family life program component, all participants in the first cohort had met the short- and medium-term outcomes of the program, with the exception of accessing related community resources (target: 70% of participants accessing within 6 months of program completion). Qualitative data indicates an increase in resilience in the participants from the first delivery block. Interpretation of the CD-RISC scores on resilience will be completed after the second delivery block, once baseline and final values are available for the second cohort.

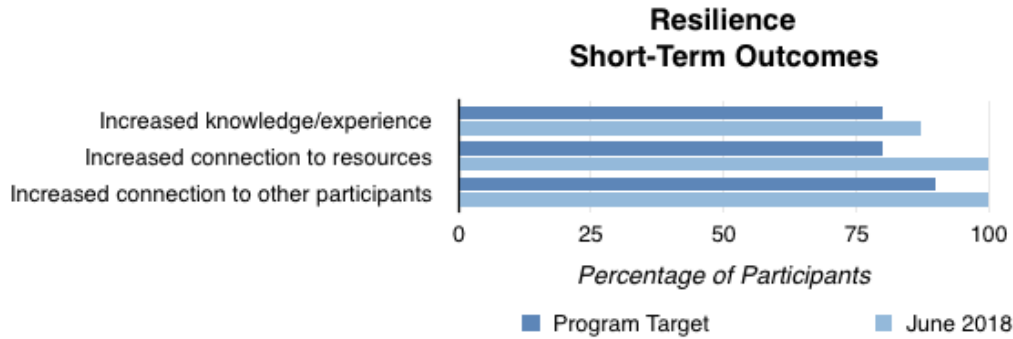


Figure 15: Resilience Short-Term Outcomes

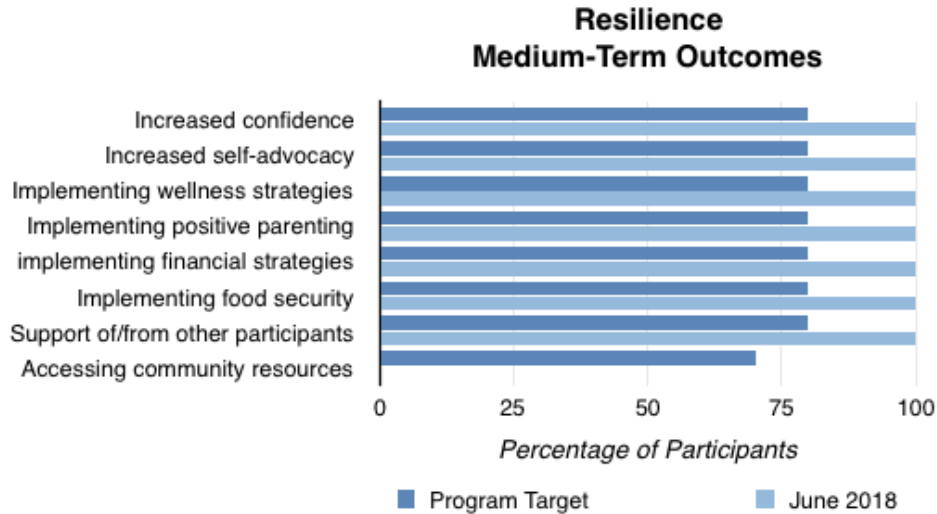


Figure 16: Resilience Medium-Term Outcomes

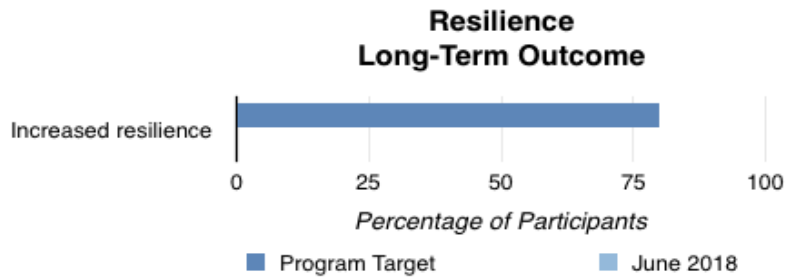


Figure 17: Resilience Long-Term Outcome

7.5 Positive Home Environment

Many aspects of the home environment have been documented in the sections above on food security, self-sufficiency, and resilience. All participants noted aspects of their home environment that were more positive because of their participation in the program (target: 80%), which was a long-term outcome for the personal/family life component of the program. In addition to the impact that a more positive home environment has on the participants, the program aimed to decrease the burden of risk experienced by their children. Comments by school staff, participants, and program partners included:

- The idea of the program is to break the generational cycle of poverty through food security and increasing employability skills. The program is designed to build wellness and build skills to enable them to make the step out of poverty.
- I'm a lot happier now because I'm doing something with my life. This gives me more life lessons.
- I see changes in myself. I'm happy. It's really cool.
- Increasing their confidence and self-esteem is huge. They have little kids looking up to them, and when mom is happy the kids are more secure.
- Working with the young moms educates the kids too, changing the trajectory of the whole family.

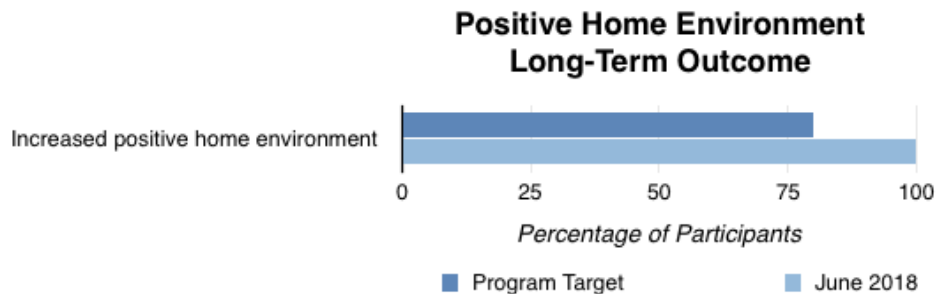


Figure 18: Positive Home Environment Long-Term Outcome

7.6 Overall Impacts

Participants were asked on the final questionnaire to identify “two things you have enjoyed about your participation in the Single Parent Project.” Their responses were:

- The culinary and parenting
- I enjoyed the cooking and positive parenting.
- Working with all the girls
- Trying new things
- The support and resources it offers
- Being able to receive three credits while in the course
- Being able to do training (POS, First Aid, Smart Serve, etc.)
- That we are so close, like a family.
- That we all have the same thing in common, having kids.
- Connecting with people on a way different level.
- Learning so much different things
- I loved learning about what the community offers.

Participants, school staff, and program partners offered many comments on the overall impact of the program. A selection of these comments is included here.

Participants:

- The best part about the program was to get credits, certificates, and bonding with other moms.
- We built up confidence in the group. [The coordinator] and the other teachers were giving us confidence, for example to go hand out resumes. [The coordinator] really helped with coping with everything, and yoga was really helpful for calming down. It makes a huge difference knowing how to cook healthy food. Everything has completely changed with the course.
- I think it is a VERY important program where single parents can support each other and feel confident in our own space. (*written response; emphasis in original*)
- When I was doing PLAR, I was on my own. This is all together, with just single parents. Before, I felt like a loser, I felt alone. I think this program is really important, really cool.
- I knew a lot of the girls before, all but one, we went to school together before. I feel a lot of us have grown, a lot have tried harder than what they did before. They showed up.

School Staff:

- As a teacher, I've always taught at-risk students. You don't judge them on what they've done. Everyone has made some decisions that were not the best. They shared their stories on how they've been judged. A lot of people need to know their stories. I learned so much from them. They are so resilient, full of life, with so much promise and strength. There is so much that they shared. I felt

- privileged, being able to sit in on the sessions and see them ask their questions, be vulnerable.
- It was intense, the most intense 10 weeks ever. I saw their journey from Day 1 – where they started and where they ended up – and saw their growth.
 - Their self-confidence increased. A number of them applied to college. They wouldn't have had the confidence to apply without this program. They looked healthier, they were eating better, and they were more self-assured, with their heads higher. They were proud of their accomplishments. It was neat to see – they made a BBQ dinner for their families and they were proud of themselves. They worked as a team and each had their role. They pushed each other to do their best and you could definitely see the pride. They gained more trust in people – in [the chef] and [the coordinator] – they were letting other people in.
 - Some have gone through addictions or abuse. For them to get through high school is a true accomplishment, with being so young, raising children themselves, and going through so much.
 - The students in the program are all struggling with trying to make things happen. This program was very confidence-building. They wouldn't have done it on their own. It was great to see how much they shone when they achieved their certifications. Some are so afraid of testing and they were ecstatic when they passed. They have a lot of responsibility in their lives and they live in poverty. They are all over 18 so you know that something interfered with obtaining their diploma. They probably have varying levels of support at home. Some live with their parents and some are on their own. Some have partners, but they don't have stability in their lives. This program gave them opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise.
 - There was a total change in these girls. It's the best program that I've seen in my 22 years. The results were just amazing. ... So many things changed for them and now we will see them graduate. These girls are on their own, and for them to learn all these skills and learn how to work as a group was so important. They had so many accomplishments through the program.
 - When the trustee stopped in, we talked about the program. I said, "We need this in every school." They are not the same girls as when they started. It's hard to believe the change.

Community Partners:

- This is a really important project for the Board to pursue. It shows a commitment to diversity and equity. Although these students 'look just like white girls,' they are disadvantaged in palpable ways.
- My recommendation would be to do more of this program. I feel like the sooner we intervene, the more time that they have to enjoy the benefits of the changes they make. When we ask women who come to our shelter, "What advice would you give your younger self?" they say, "Get out sooner." They are also learning how to be good, supportive, non-judgmental friends.
- I saw a great improvement in them. It was opening their eyes that there is more than their small world.

- I see a tremendous value in this program. I wish all students in all communities had this. I hope they can continue to find funding for such an empowering program. This is how you make real change. There are health care system benefits, employment, retention – the foundation needs to be solid for all of that to happen.
- I feel it's a really necessary and fantastic program. Gaining self-esteem and confidence building, as well as skills. Talking to them about the critical childhood phase and how parenting impacts that and giving support to young parents in raising their children. Thinking about, "How do I want to parent my child?" Giving them space to learn about it. They were not necessarily planned and prepared for a child.
- I see the issues impacting these students every day. I'd like to see what their responses are, what they want to do next. The program fills a need and keeps the girls engaged. They need to have more than one kick at the can.
- They looked confident, spoke well about their situations. They advocated for themselves. They had learned different ways of talking to each other. They were lovely with each other, naturally providing the emotional support that is so necessary. They were pleased to be taken seriously as young women. 'These people are listening to us and not treating us as the kids at the table.' It's a moment of owning the space you're standing in.
- At the beginning, they said, "I'm never going to graduate this year." By the end, one was accepted to college. I was worried that nine participants were not enough to make a big impact, but when you see the change in their lives, the individual impacts, it made me say, "How can we make this broadly available?" They are not only finishing high school but taking their next steps.

8 PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

The following suggestions for potential program modifications were offered by participants, program staff, and program partners. These suggestions have been recorded here for program management to consider, given the constraints of time and resources for program implementation.

8.1 Recruiting

Word of mouth was a very effective recruiting tool in the first delivery block. The program may wish to consider this as a formal part of the recruitment process in the future, by inviting former participants to talk about the program in classes, using quotations from the participants in promotional materials, and contacting former participants to notify them of the program dates and ask them to spread the word to those who might be interested. One community partner indicated,

It would be great to have these girls come back and talk to the next group, tell the new students, 'I was exactly in your position. I didn't think I would graduate.' They could also visit the School for Young Moms to let them know about this program as the next step, and why they should be part of it. The message at the

School for Young Moms could be, 'Next month you can go here,' when they or their child are aging out of the School for Young Moms program. It could be part of the regular pathway.

The vice-principal noted, "The ideal would be to have this program completely integrated into the school, so that when the students age out of the School for Young Moms, they could access this program to help finish their credits. Other students could be part of the program too."

All of the agencies who were involved in program delivery were willing to assist with recruitment and indicated that being contacted about a month before the program starts (late August or early September) would give enough time to identify and refer potential participants for the second delivery block. Interviewees suggested other agencies who could refer potential participants, including the Peterborough Child and Family Centres, Social Services, the Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre, PARN (Peterborough Aids Resource Network), Nobody's Perfect, and the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. Participants indicated that posters could be displayed at the Ontario Works offices, Peterborough Square, children's clothing stores, street poles, doctors' offices, community agencies, the courthouse, food banks, and the Peterborough Child and Family Centres. They also suggested advertising through local radio stations and Peterborough This Week, which is distributed free locally. If the website for the program remains consistent, including it on the promotional material in the future could assist with recruitment.

To overcome the barrier that childcare poses to participation in the program, school staff suggested that it could be helpful to have a community partner who knows how to navigate the childcare subsidy system to support the participants in applying and assist in advocating for a childcare space. School staff indicated, "We could expand the preparation phase to have daycare assistance built-in so the door doesn't shut when they don't have daycare."

8.2 Scheduling

The first program delivery block was delayed due to staffing issues. It was planned for earlier in the semester. Program participants and school staff concurred that the program should be offered earlier (suggested times were January-March or February-April) to give more time to finish other credits after the program ends. The guidance counsellor noted that finishing at the end of June caused issues for college and OSAP applications, since they must also have a letter to prove that they are sole support parents for OSAP. The guidance counsellor worked with Fleming College to extend the deadline for applications, but indicated, "It might not be so easy if they were applying to other colleges or universities. It would take the stress off to have more time to complete all the steps."

As discussed above, three weeks of program planning and preparation is a tight schedule for the coordinator. Program partners whose sessions began in the first week also indicated that it would have been helpful to have more time for preparation.

The coordinator indicated that the daily schedule could be changed to be more reflective of PACE's schedule, with sessions from 10:00-11:30 and 12:00-1:30. This would lessen disruptions by allowing the students to take breaks with the rest of the student body and not having the bell interrupting the sessions. Another possibility would be to start earlier (9:30-11:30) to take advantage of the morning when participants are most engaged. She also noted that Friday afternoons could be work periods rather than scheduled sessions so that students could attend the hot lunch that is provided for all students at PACE on Fridays as well as the PACE boutique (second-hand clothes and other items). Participants could work on assignments for other credits on Friday afternoons or schedule their appointments at that time, to allow for less disruption during the week.

Some participants were in favour of having a longer program, up to a full semester. School staff indicated that a longer program could interfere with obtaining other credits and might not give the same 'intense' experience that created the close bonds between participants and the sense of momentum that was a feature of the ten-week program. It would also require additional resources.

8.3 Number of Participants

The grant proposal indicated that the target for the number of participants per delivery block was 20. However, in the first delivery block, the maximum number of participants at one time was 10 (of the eleven participants in total, one participant left the program after her first day, before the final three participants joined). Based on the experience gained in the first delivery block, the coordinator, the chef, and the participants felt that this group size was ideal. Other school staff concurred, noting, "Although we said this time, 'We only have 10,' it is kind of the magic number."

In terms of the number of participants per session, the coordinator indicated that the maximum number that one coordinator could support would be 15, while still providing the level of one-on-one support required to create a strong bond and assist the participants in completing the program. She also felt that having more than 15 participants would lead to small groups forming within the main group, and that "they wouldn't have an opportunity to speak and have their voice heard. [In the first delivery block] There were a lot of different perspectives and that is hugely important." The minimum number that she recommended was 5-7 participants. She noted, "There need to be enough participants for people to know that they aren't alone in feeling or thinking the way they do." Participants indicated that the smallest group size would be 5-8 people and the largest no more than twelve. Interviewees concurred that the maximum number of participants that could be accommodated in the kitchen facilities at one time was about ten. The chef noted, "With 10 people, it's pretty busy in the kitchen, and they are on top of one another." He indicated that 8-10 was a good group size.

Some interviewees proposed that the program could have two sessions running concurrently in order to accommodate 20 participants. In this format, half of the group would participate in a culinary session and the other half in a workshop and then the

groups would switch activities. The groups could alternate in a morning/afternoon format or have two full-day culinary sessions per week with alternating days for workshops. The coordinator indicated that some of the certifications could be done together as a large group. However, she noted, “It would be very difficult to only have half the group at a time. It wouldn’t give the same results, the same conversations.” She also indicated that more coordination time and program budget would be required if the participant numbers doubled and the sessions were being offered twice.

8.4 Program Participants

Suggestions were made about expanding the eligibility for the program to under-18s and to those who don’t have children. Suggestions were also made about including male parents and those who are not the primary caregiver, do not have custody, or are not parents.

Under-18s

The requirement for participants to be over 18 was a legacy from the previous funder. School staff noted that this creates a gap in programming for young mothers who are under 18 but whose child is over one year old and thus no longer eligible for the School for Young Moms program. The coordinator indicated, “This program is of value to anyone who has kids. For under-18s, some of the conversations may not reflect their world. They may not be at the same place, but it could be motivational to hear from the older students.” Other school staff indicated that the over-18 requirement also simplifies program administration, since there is no need for permission forms and other legalities. Some under-18s are living independently and would not require parental permission.

Male Parents

Some of the participants felt strongly that it would be a valuable program for male parents as well, and some school staff and program partners concurred. Opinions were divided as to whether the program could be run as a co-ed program. The interviewees who were in favour of a co-ed approach stated that there would need to be separate sessions for some parts of the program, such as healthy relationships, to allow for full discussions. Another proposal was to alternate between male and female cohorts, with a session offered yearly for each, or to have one group in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

Some participants also suggested that partners could be involved for certain sessions, although other participants disagreed, indicating that this format would not work out well for those without partners. Some interviewees felt that there could be a young couples program, while others indicated that having couples in the program would cause issues with dynamics. The coordinator stated, “At times I wished there were a male perspective. ... With all girls, they could talk more freely. They succeeded at having a ‘judgment-free group.’ Some have issues with trusting males.”

The coordinator stated that the teacher could be male or female; she indicated that she would feel comfortable facilitating a male group and she has male colleagues who could facilitate both groups as well. Other interviewees thought that the teacher should be the same gender as the group, to create a role model and a welcoming space for deeper discussions.

Comments included:

- I think that young dads need the exact same course. So many dads have responsibilities with children but don't have the support and the training.
- There is nothing for fathers. I know some single dads who aren't going to school because it's so hard. Here they would get to learn about parenting and raising kids. It's hard for them to go and ask for help. It's intimidating. There are so many young men here at the school who could use this course.
- If there is a way to incorporate [men] that would be great. When it's just women, there are aspects that people will feel freer to talk about, but there are single fathers. It might be a challenge to incorporate them. The program should continue, and maybe there should be a male program too. If you try combining the genders, people aren't as comfortable. I have shared access with my former partner, so a program like this would help him.
- The program should be for men too. It's the Single Parent Program. It could be fathers and mothers together – we are all single parents and we all need the same advice. It could be together or separate, a program for single dads. Fathers should be included. They need to learn what we're learning. It's harder on them – they don't have a mother's instinct. It would help them to bond with their kids and have a support group. Fathers feel more put down, disgraced to be a single dad.
- We need a single dad project too. They could use it as well. It could be the same curriculum, with parenting, foods, etc. It wouldn't work as a co-ed program. The bonds that they formed wouldn't have happened. We have dads here who are single parents and some who only see their kids every couple of weeks. That makes it easy to give in to the kids, but this way they would get a better appreciation for the problems that can cause. It would help them with co-parenting.
- The program should be available for young men too. It's the Single Parent Program and this was the first year that the posters did not indicate it was only for females. It's an important message, especially in today's society, that the responsibility for parenting is not only on the mothers. The dads need help as well.
- I've done young mom programs before. I wonder where the young men are. It would be helpful to bring in that support. If they are both able to support the children, then the woman isn't responsible for everything.

Parents without Custody

One of the participants in the first cohort did not have custody of her child. The coordinator stated, "I had to argue to get her into the program, because she didn't have

custody of her child. Now she is a major success story of the program.” Another interviewee indicated, “[The program] has value for people who want to be present in their child’s life, whether or not they have custody.” As well, the parenting certification that the participants receive as part of the program can support them in their arrangements with the Children’s Aid Society or in court.

Non-Parents

Although some students who would like to work with children but were not parents expressed interest in joining the program, the coordinator felt that much of the bonding that occurred in the program was due to the shared experience of pregnancy, birthing, breastfeeding, and parenting. Some participants felt that it should be just for parents. Others thought that the material in the program is of value to everyone, with comments such as, “The whole school would benefit from this. It should be offered to everyone, not just the people in the program.” Another stated, “It should be for people who need the program, not just people who need the credits. There are people who aren’t in school who need it and want it.”

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that program management decide on eligibility for the upcoming delivery block, clarify the promotional materials if necessary, and communicate the decision to program partners, along with any longer-term plan to examine options.

8.5 Program Content

Program participants, school staff, and partner agencies indicated a number of suggestions for modifications to the program content.

Overall Comments

As noted in Section 5.3, program partners recommended having a discussion at the beginning of the program to make expectations clear and involve the participants in establishing ground rules around attendance, punctuality, and cell phone use. A facilitator also noted that it would be helpful to have an overview of topics being covered in other workshops to allow for more coordination between the sessions, since there is crossover in some topic areas. For example, facilitators could receive a schedule that outlines the topics being addressed in all of the workshops, allowing them to plan how they can complement what is being offered by others. Another suggestion was to conduct a needs assessment with the participants to strengthen the case for the program.

Culinary Training

Participants indicated that they would have liked more time for culinary training, although the coordinator noted, “One week they had 3½ days in the kitchen and it was too much. They were burnt out.” One participant stated that she would have liked to learn more about healthy eating. There was also a suggestion that it would be helpful to

have a package of essential tools (cutting board, knife, etc.) for each student to take home to make food preparation easier.

Other program partners also provided culinary training. The participants found it confusing to work with different styles of kitchen management and techniques than that of the chef who led the ongoing culinary training. The coordinator suggested that it would be helpful if other facilitators complement the methods being used in the program rather than introducing a different method. Another possibility would be to prepare the program participants before the other culinary training by indicating that different chefs manage the kitchen in different ways and presenting it as an opportunity to broaden their experience, as they would be expected in a culinary workplace to adapt to the kitchen management style of the chef.

Modeling Soft Skills

A program partner noted, “It’s important to explicitly teach them how to talk with authorities like school, court, to achieve what they want, to negotiate. They may not have had that modeling in their lives.” This could be achieved by having them watch while the teacher makes calls on their behalf or by practicing the type of interaction that could occur with the financial aid office or a child’s school. She noted, “These are skills that middle-class people take for granted, but it may not be the environment they grew up in. This offers an opportunity to step into that role for the kids who never had that, help them in navigating the system, taking those skills to the next level. By teaching them both the academic and the social skills, it will apply to their whole lives.”

Field Trips

The field trip to Toronto to see George Brown College and the St. Lawrence Market was a program highlight for everyone who participated; the participant who had been in the program in the previous two years noted that this experience was the best out of all three years. Participants also indicated that they enjoyed their trip to the Peterborough Farmer’s Market. The coordinator noted that field trips to local restaurants with different types of kitchens would be very interesting, so that the participants could see the kitchens in action and have a better understanding of what types of jobs are available. She also indicated that trips to the Food Bank and the One Roof Community Diner would be helpful for participants to connect with other food support resources in the community. Another opportunity would be to participate in a gleaning trip, to introduce the participants to this community food support resource.

Gardening

The coordinator noted that there is an opportunity to include more about gardening as another method of connecting with healthy food. The participants in the first delivery block received plants and some were excited to plant them at home.

Careers

The coordinator indicated that she had many discussions with participants about their career plans; some knew the career that they were interested in pursuing, and for others it was a conversation about what they enjoy and how that could become a career path. She noted that it would be helpful to spend more time on the next steps. A participant suggested a career day, exploring what people want to do next. She noted that there were helpful discussions with some facilitators regarding certain types of careers and indicated, “For those who have three or four ideas, it would be good to talk about skill building and job fit. When you have a child, it’s daunting. How do you pick a career and juggle children at the same time?” A program partner suggested that the program may wish to consider talking to participants about working in the trades so that they have opportunities for employment when they finish school.

Post-Secondary Education

A facilitator suggested that closer ties could be developed with Trent and Fleming “to create an easier track to post-secondary for these students. For example, someone from Fleming could come to speak, or the students could go to campus. That would solidify the implicit next step for them.” The students could tour the trades building at Fleming and see for themselves that there are women in those programs. A participant also suggested that it could be helpful to discuss living on OSAP and how it’s different from OW.

Mentoring

The coordinator indicated that it would be valuable to have the Aspire mentoring program involved early in the delivery block to allow time for matching. In addition to providing support for the participants, mentors could help them make other connections in the community. A program partner also mentioned that having mentors to help them stay in university and college would be helpful, noting, “It’s difficult when you’re the first one in your family to navigate that.” She suggested that the Soroptimists might be interested in mentoring. Another suggestion was to invite program graduates to mentor the next groups, “to help build a bridge for those who follow them.”

Court Support

Participants and the coordinator agreed that more time with the Court Support team would be beneficial. The Court Support facilitator proposed that a court support worker could come in to the program several times to meet with participants in the classroom and help them stabilize their situations. The coordinator also indicated that one-on-one time for participants to receive answers to their personal questions would be beneficial.

Financial Literacy

Both of the financial literacy facilitators indicated that they would like to have more time with the participants in order to answer their questions and allow for more discussion of finances. The facilitator from the CCRC noted, “With moms that age, they need time to

express their experience. Maybe keep the content to 1.5 hours but have 2-3 hours to cover it, lots of time for conversation.” She indicated that it would be helpful to know more about them ahead of time, such as their financial challenges. The session on vision boards and planning could be scheduled near the end of the program, as participants are thinking about their next steps.

Healthy Relationships

The facilitator suggested that KSAC could do one session on their services and another session on healthy relationships, to have more time to explore the topic. She also noted that she would bring a co-facilitator from the clinical counselling team in the future, to be able to offer in-depth answers to questions and deal with any activation of painful memories. She noted, “This topic will generate heavier conversations, so it would be better to make sure it’s scheduled partway through, not in the initial days of the program, so that they have time to create that safe space first. We can come in later once the relationships have formed.”

Another program partner suggested that KSAC could show the Resilience film about adverse childhood experiences research to help the participants understand the effects of trauma. She noted, “When you are focused on survival, longer-term planning isn’t possible. When our clients say they won’t do something that seems beneficial, I look for the ‘hidden can’t’ – the real reason behind their refusal. Everyone wants to be in a better position, but if you have a barrier that you believe you can’t overcome, you’ll just say you won’t do it.” She also recommended the Brain Architecture game, which demonstrates the effects of positive and negative life experiences on brain development. It brings a better awareness of how traumas affect the brain and could be useful for both students and teachers.

Yoga

As mentioned above, the participants had preconceptions about yoga that interfered with their openness to trying it out, but they benefitted from the breathing techniques and other aspects of yoga. The yoga sessions could be renamed so that participants would not be held back by their preconceptions.

Community Counselling and Resource Centre

The CCRC facilitator indicated that they have a number of other programs and supports that could be of interest to the participants.

- The Housing Resource Centre could give them information about their rights, the importance of keeping receipts, not underestimating the costs of a rental, making choices about accommodation, signing contracts, leases, what to do if you are in a bad situation, what to do if you have a bad co-tenant. They can also talk about not getting in over your head [when choosing a rental] to pre-empt people having to move. [The coordinator noted that participants are experiencing very insecure and unsafe housing situations. She also indicated that it would be helpful to know how to access subsidized housing.]

- We have clinical counsellors who could talk about self-care and stress.
- We have counsellors who can talk about recognizing signs of unhealthy relationships, to pre-empt long-term damage. We have a women's group called 'Choices and Changes' about choosing healthy relationships with friends, family members, and partners. They talk about all kinds of abuse, not just physical: financial abuse, verbal, bullying in relationships.

Children's Aid Society

The YWCA facilitator has a contact at the CAS who is "very successful at creating rapport and assisting parents and children." She noted, "The threat of CAS involvement is very real in their lives, and [the CAS contact] can have that frank discussion with them about what they've experienced. They will recognize her as a person who understands their situation."

Adult Training Network

The Adult Training Network has other training sessions that would be beneficial for participants, especially the soft skills training, which would offer them the opportunity to gain other important skills and more certifications.

Peterborough Public Health

PPH offers many programs that could be useful for the participants. The coordinator suggested that in addition to the parenting workshops and the dieticians, PPH could present its other programs, such as the dental clinic.

Giving Back

The coordinator indicated that she would have liked to have a project in which the participants were giving back to the community. One possibility would be to volunteer together to prepare a meal for the One Roof Community Diner, putting their culinary skills to work and doing something for others. One Roof is also a place where the participants could volunteer to gain more food service experience.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that program management review the suggestions for program content modifications and determine the suitability for inclusion of the suggestions in the future, while retaining the focus on the core program.

9 CONCLUSION

The Enhanced Single Parent Project was largely implemented as designed, with a few variances due mainly to scheduling difficulties. Through a program offering experiential learning for a small group of participants with common issues and experiences and a

supportive coordinator, the participants were in an environment that increased their motivation to attend and engaged them in their learning. Participants indicated that the combination of feeling supported and having new ways of managing their lives in key areas (financial, wellness, parenting, relationships, etc.) provided the impetus for them to move forward with their goals. Participants, school staff, and program partners provided strong qualitative evidence in support of program effectiveness for the first cohort of program participants in increasing food security in the short term, as well as in laying the foundation for increased self-sufficiency, resilience, and positive home environment. The program is currently preparing for the second delivery block; an impact evaluation will be conducted of outcomes for the first and second cohorts after the program is complete.

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

PROGRAM COMPONENTS	Secondary School Education	Career Pathway	Personal/Family Life
INPUTS	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, Adult Training Network, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen	LPRF funding; staff (coordinator, guidance, student retention counsellor, admin); local agencies; classroom, teaching kitchen
ACTIVITIES	Recruitment, experiential learning (culinary training, certifications, workshops), connections with PACE, coaching/mentoring	Pathway planning (post-sec ed, training, employment), experiential learning, resume prep, connections with agencies, coaching	Workshops (positive parenting, financial lit., wellness, food security), connections with agencies and other participants, coaching
OUTPUTS	Training, certification, workshop sessions; classroom learning; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. secondary school education	Training, certification, workshop sessions; pathway planning, resume development; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. pathways	Training, workshop sessions; individual coaching/mentoring/advocacy sessions re. personal/family life
SHORT- TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	Increased knowledge and experience re. culinary, financial, wellness, parenting (self-report, staff report); increased connection to PACE (self-report, staff report)	Increased knowledge of pathways (self-report, staff report); increased level of preparedness (training, pathway plan, resume, self-report, staff); connections to community resources (self-report, staff)	Increased knowledge and experience re. culinary, financial, wellness, parenting (self-report, staff report); increased connection to community resources and to other program participants (self-report, staff)
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	Increased engagement in education (% completing program, self-report, staff report); increased performance at school (# credits earned, self-report, staff report)	Increased engagement in pursuing pathway (% implementing plan, self-report, staff report); increased accessing of related community resources (% accessing)	Increased confidence , self-advocacy, implementing wellness, positive parenting, financial, food security practices (self-report, staff report); increased accessing of related community resources (% accessing)
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES & INDICATORS	High school graduation (% graduating within one year of program completion)	Youth engaged in employment/post-sec education/ training (% engaged within 6 months of high school graduation)	Increased positive home environment (self-report); increased resilience (CD-RISC scale, self-report, staff report)

APPENDIX B: OUTCOME INDICATORS

The following tables contain the outcomes and indicators, organized by program goals (food security, self-sufficiency, resilience and positive home environment).

Table 1: Immediate Food Security Outcomes and Indicators

Immediate Food Security	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased culinary knowledge/experience (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased financial knowledge/experience (target: 80% of participants)
	Connection to food security community resources (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing food security resources at school (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased use of culinary skills at home (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed family budget (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing community resources related to immediate food security within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Long-term outcomes related to Food Security are covered under Self-Sufficiency (below)

Table 2: Self-Sufficiency Outcomes and Indicators

Self-Sufficiency	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased knowledge/experience in certifications and resume-building (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to school (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased accessing of school services (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased knowledge re. pathways (target: 90% of participants)
	Completed pathway plan (target: 90% of participants)
	Received coaching/mentoring re. pathway plan (target: 90% of participants)
	Culinary training attendance (target: 80% attendance)
	Increased knowledge for culinary job (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed certifications (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed resume (target: 90% of participants)
	More prepared to start on pathway (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased connection to pathway resources (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased engagement in education (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased confidence in class (target: 80% of participants)
	Completed program (target: 90% of participants)
	Earned 3 credits (target: 80% of participants)
	Enrolled in additional credits after program (target: 90% of participants)
	Increased engagement in pursuing post-secondary education/employment/training (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing initial pathway steps (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing pathway resources within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Graduated within 1 year of program completion (target: 80% of participants)
	Engaged in post-secondary education, employment, training within 6 months of graduation (target: 80% of participants)

Table 3: Resilience and Positive Home Environment Outcomes and Indicators

Resilience/Positive Home Environment	Indicators
Short-Term Outcomes	Increased knowledge/experience in wellness and family-related topics (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to personal/family life-related resources (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased connection to other participants (target: 80% of participants)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Increased confidence (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased self-advocacy (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing wellness strategies (target: 90% of participants)
	Implementing positive parenting (target: 80% of participants)
	Implementing financial strategies (target: 80% of participants)
	Support of/from other participants (target: 80% of participants)
	Accessing community resources related to personal/family life within 6 months of program completion (target: 70% of participants)
Long-Term Outcomes	Increased resilience (target: 80% of participants)
	Increased positive home environment (target: 80% of participants)

APPENDIX C: THEORY OF CHANGE

Goals

The goals of the initiative are to increase participants' food security, self-sufficiency and resilience through culinary training, completing high school, designing and implementing a career pathway plan (post-secondary education, training, employment), and establishing a more positive home environment and personal well-being. These changes in the lives of the participants also benefit their children, providing an intergenerational impact through addressing the ongoing food insecurity faced by these families and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Assumptions

- Supporting single female parents in completing high school, pursuing their career pathway, building resilience, increasing food security, and establishing a positive home environment will improve their life outcomes and can increase their children's health, growth, and development outcomes and aid in breaking the cycle of poverty.
- Most single female parents 18+ who have not completed high school and who have limited work experience require additional program supports to assist them in finishing their credits, pursuing their career pathway, building resilience, and establishing a positive home environment.
- Current programs to support pregnant teenagers and young mothers in completing high school include age restrictions that create a gap in supports for those over 21 or who have children over the age of one year.
- Women taking part in the enhanced single parent program must have childcare arrangements. The program cannot provide childcare due to staffing requirements; childcare subsidies and spaces are available in the community.
- Experiential learning is engaging and will assist students in acquiring credits as well as life skills, employment skills, certifications, and training.
- Connecting with a caring, supportive staff member at school assists students in re-engaging with their studies and persisting until completion.
- Single parents benefit from the support of a community of others who are facing similar challenges.
- Bringing community supports into one central location reduces barriers to access faced by single parents, and the assistance of a supportive staff member aids in navigating relevant resources.
- Support is required to assist the participants in managing life issues as they arise, allowing them to continue to participate in the program.
- Most single female parents with low socio-economic status experience significant levels of stress and disruption that affect their ability to focus on education, employment, and positive parenting. Wellness strategies and the support of the

- coordinator are important aids in assisting them to manage and diminish the effects of stress.
- Increasing culinary skills in combination with financial literacy related to food and family increases food security in the short term, and providing culinary training and certifications assists with credit acquisition and employability, aiding long-term food security.

Theory of Change

Based on the assumptions above, the Enhanced Single Parent Program is designed to provide the experiential learning and supports needed to assist female single parents who are over 18 in completing high school, designing and implementing steps toward their chosen post-secondary goals, increasing their resilience, and building a more positive home environment. The core of the program is the culinary component, which aids food security while increasing confidence and sense of community, as well as credit acquisition, employability skills, and certifications. The program integrates key supports from Peterborough community agencies, assisting students in connecting with these supports and in benefitting from their services, while using these experiences to achieve credit requirements. The significant levels of stress and disruption in the lives of these students, as well as their often-negative prior school experiences, make it crucial that the program coordinator be a caring, welcoming individual who encourages students in their reconnection with school, assists them in resolving issues as they arise, and facilitates the establishment of a community of support among the students. Through their achievements in acquiring new skills and certifications as well as parenting and wellness strategies, and through supporting and receiving support from each other and from the coordinator, participants gain confidence, increase their ability to advocate for themselves and others, build resilience, increase self-sufficiency, and establish a more positive home environment.

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES

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