

# Smart Practices for at-risk, homeless and formerly homeless youth employment programs in Metro Vancouver

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## What You Need to Know

There are a wide variety of support services in the Metro Vancouver region that provide employment programs designed to assist youth. However, homeless youth face a unique set of challenges in regard to obtaining and maintaining employment. While employment programs have the potential to improve youths' self-esteem, increase their level of community attachment, expand their social capital, and assist them with obtaining sustainable employment, the overall effectiveness of these programs is largely unknown and is limited by underlying structural issues that perpetuate the marginalization of homeless youth. Structural issues include poverty, shortages of affordable housing, labour market conditions, and credentialism. The research findings indicate a need for further integration of services and funding as well as a greater emphasis on qualitative performance indicators to assess program success within the context of these structural factors.

## Research Context

These employment programs can be categorized into three subtypes according to their objectives: employment readiness preparation, skills training development, and employment placement facilitation. The key objectives of this research were to:

- 1) Gather evidence from the literature on six main themes: the causes of youth homelessness, diversity of the homeless youth population, barriers to employment, benefits of employment, employment models designed to assist homeless youth, and youth perspectives on employment services;
- 2) Map youth employment services in Metro Vancouver in order to gain a better understanding of the types of resources that are currently available to at-risk, homeless, and formerly homeless youth; and
- 3) Assess the relevance, success, and cost-effectiveness of the three employment program subtypes.

## How was this Research Completed?

The researchers used three methods to collect the data: a literature review, document review, and interviews with representatives from organizations in Metro Vancouver that provide employment programs geared toward at-risk, homeless, and formerly homeless youth. The literature review provided a broad overview of the research topic, highlighted major themes and trends, and summarized available evidence.

## Research Findings

5 smart practices were identified through the research:

### Develop holistic programs with wrap-around supports

Employment training is most effective when integrated into a broader system of supports that includes shelter, income, and access to appropriate health care and social supports. The research suggests that the most effective youth employment programs incorporate all three subtypes of programming: employment readiness preparation, skills training development, and employment placement facilitation, in a staged process.

### Strengthen partnerships between service providers

Strategic partnerships between service providers are key to ensuring ongoing program effectiveness and early interventions to prevent at-risk youth from becoming homeless.

### Adopt a flexible service delivery model tailored to individual needs

Employment programs should be client-driven and include a focus on developing an individualized plan that aligns with the needs and goals of each program participant.

### Expand the criteria for program outcomes

Develop a qualitative or a mixed-methods approach to program evaluation. This would consider the individual circumstances of program participants in addition to external structural and socioeconomic factors that influence youths' employment success such as the state of the housing market and labour market conditions.

### Actively engage current and potential employers

Understanding the concerns and needs of employers is important to inform program design and delivery and ensure that they have the capacity to provide the necessary support to youth and the commitment to work with service providers for the long term. To encourage employer participation, service providers should focus on relationship-building, set clear expectations of all parties involved; and simplify the hiring process and requirements for employers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ❖ Focus on the development of Foyer Model-based housing initiatives

*An important part of the Foyer Model is that it provides a holistic environment with wraparound supports.*

### ❖ Form a working group to engage local employers

*The mandate of this group would be to raise awareness for organizations currently providing employment programs for youth; to break down negative stereotypes associated with homeless youth; and to work to create systemic change.*

### ❖ Collaborate with service providers and community foundations to provide employment readiness programs

### ❖ Pursue further research on the evaluation of at-risk, homeless, and formerly homeless youths' needs and employment programming

### ❖ Maintain communication with the BC Government to promote enhanced service delivery for at-risk, homeless, and formerly homeless youth once more evidence is gathered

*Continue to gather evidence on the effectiveness of the Employment Program of BC and the WorkBC service delivery model with the aim of proposing changes to better meet the needs of at-risk, homeless, and formerly homeless youth.*

This summary provides a brief overview of the same titled report by Erin S. Fletcher and Laura E. Muller that can be found at <http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/handle/1828/7027>