



URBAN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT/EDUCATION SERVICE

# Evaluation of the Urban Youth Employment and Education Service

July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

Cathy Wright & Jamie Gamble March 2022



HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL



The Learning  
Exchange  
educate  
innovate  
empower



TEEN RESOURCE CENTRE

Funded in part by the Government  
of Canada under the Youth  
Employment and Skills Strategy

Canada

Imagine ...

You're 17, alone and homeless in Saint John, New Brunswick. You want to finish high school, but no landlord will lease to you. You have no money, and no family support. What do you?



UYES! is a community-based response to the needs of the many youth in Saint John who are not employed, or in education or training programs. Delivered by a partnership of well-respected agencies, UYES! supports youth on their change journeys. It provides flexible opportunities to learn, work, and grow personal networks while navigating and surmounting barriers. For more details, read on.





*FAR Away Kitchen booth at the Queen Square Farmers Market in Saint John.*

## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introducing UYES!.....	3
About the Evaluation.....	5
Key UYES! Components .....	6
<b>SECTION TWO: PROGRAM IMPACTS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Program Impacts on Education and Employment .....	8
UYES! and Partnerships .....	9
<b>CONCLUSION: UYES! IS ACHIEVING RESULTS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: THE UYES! PROGRAM MODEL .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Theory of Change .....	13
UYES! Partners and their Contributions .....	14
Program Components of UYES! .....	16
<b>APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: CASE STUDIES.....</b>	<b>29</b>
Case Studies.....	29
What the Case Studies Demonstrate.....	40



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Urban Youth Education/Employment Service (UYES!) is a comprehensive community response to meeting the needs of the high number of youth in Saint John Not in Employment, Education or Training programs (NEET). Under the leadership of the Saint John Human Development Council, UYES! is delivered by a partnership of well-respected agencies, each of which contributes their knowledge and experience in working with youth and building pathways to employment.

UYES! empowers youth to affirm and achieve their desired education and employment goals. The project supports youth on their change journey by providing flexible opportunities to learn, work, and grow personal networks while navigating and surmounting barriers. These barriers have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures, a scarcity of entry-level jobs, rising rents and low vacancy, coupled with spikes in depression and anxiety, are all affecting young adults more than any other segment of the population.<sup>1</sup> Solutions are needed, but not easily created.

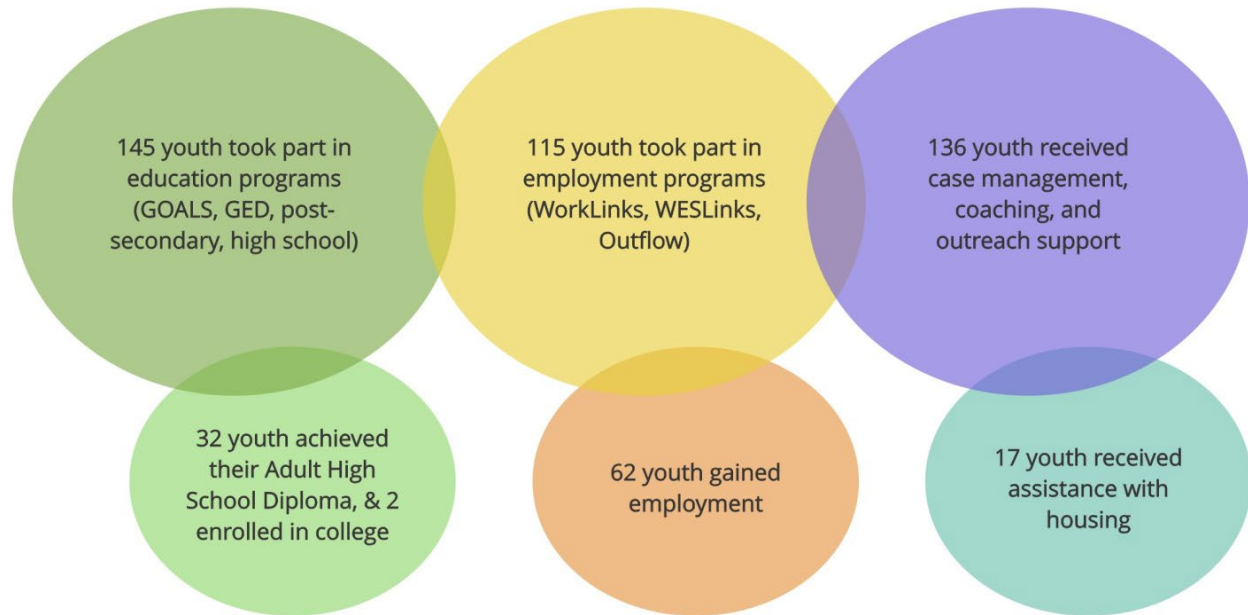
UYES! is a solution that works. Through governmental support, interagency collaboration, and a flexible, client-centric approach, UYES! helps hundreds of youth 15-30 years of age find the stability and support needed to elevate their lives through education, employment, and engagement. Innovative programming, combined with wraparound supports and financial interventions and incentives, enable youth to move from survival towards autonomy, breaking the generational cycle of poverty. In a community where 32% of children live in poverty,<sup>2</sup> UYES! is a vitally important program.

<sup>1</sup> René Morissette, "Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data report, Chapter 2: Youth Employment in Canada" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada: July 26, 2021), p.19, and Didier Garriguet, "Portrait of youth in Canada: Data report, Chapter 1: Health of Youth in Canada" (Ottawa, Statistics Canada, February 1, 2021), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Saint John Human Development Council, "Ward Profiles 2021", p. 2 (Taxfiler 2018 T1FF), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://sjhdc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ward-Profiles-2021-Update-1.pdf>.



Of 212 UYES! participants, July 2020 - September 2021 ...



With current annual funding of \$726,044, UYES! contributes to or covers the employment costs for 15 staff members across five local non-profit agencies, thus empowering and connecting those organizations and their capacity for community development. The success of the project has also led to collaborative initiatives to counter youth homelessness and provide work terms, leveraging over \$310,000 in additional funding from the community.

The following report reveals what the UYES! team and participants have accomplished in the first half of the second phase of this federally-funded project. The results to date will show that UYES! is well on its way to meeting the deliverables over the three-year period 2020-2023 in terms of participation, education, and employment.

*Participant Will Ferris at the Teen Resource Centre, 2022. Over the eight years that he has been engaged there, Will has gone from being withdrawn to being a mentor, leader, and budding photographer.*



## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Introducing UYES!

For youth in Canada, lasting and meaningful work is increasingly difficult to find. Changing labour market conditions, automation, the rise of precarious employment,<sup>3</sup> and mismatches between supply and demand pose serious challenges to job-seekers of any age. For youth with low levels of education and other disadvantages, even poor-quality, entry-level jobs can be completely out of reach.<sup>4</sup>

Youth who are not connected to the school system or the labour market (“NEET”<sup>5</sup>) are more likely to experience multiple economic, health, and psychosocial challenges, such as poor labour-market outcomes (e.g., unemployment), poor housing conditions, early parenthood, depression, and social exclusion.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has complicated matters for young people still further by impacting their access to programs (notably to online learning, due to the required technology), to supports, and to opportunities to enter the workforce or post-secondary education. The last two years have also augmented other barriers for youth, particularly housing insecurity, due to rising rental costs and accessibility.

In Saint John,<sup>7</sup> close to 2,000 youth between the ages of 15 and 30 are *not in employment, education, or training* and face multiple barriers such as housing, family breakdown, mental health, addictions, food, and transportation, any and all of which may thwart employment or school attendance.

Saint John has an overall poverty rate of 22.8% and a child poverty rate of 32.1%.<sup>8</sup> The community has a significant incidence of intergenerational poverty and a concentration of poverty in specific low-income neighbourhoods. UYES! and its partners are located in one of those neighbourhoods, Waterloo Village.

The Urban Youth Employment and Education Service (UYES!) is a three-year youth employment and educational initiative with wraparound supports, funded in part by the Government of Canada under the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS).

UYES! targets youth who face multiple barriers and are at risk of social and economic exclusion. UYES! is a vital part of Saint John’s effort to stave off the generational cycle of poverty and even more importantly, to build a skilled and confident workforce for the future.

---

<sup>3</sup> Morissette, p. 10. From 1976 to 2019, the proportion of young men and women employed part-time on an involuntary basis grew far more than the proportion employed part-time voluntarily.

<sup>4</sup> Guyn Cooper Research Associates, “Improving Employment Outcomes for Vulnerable Youth” (Calgary, May 2018).

<sup>5</sup> OECD, “Youth not in education or employment (NEET) (indicator),” accessed February 13, 2020, doi: 10.1787/72d1033a-en.

<sup>6</sup> Morissette, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Saint John Human Development Council, *Community Reflections*, Issue 13 (2019), p.1. Saint John is above average in both the provincial and national percentages in all three NEET age categories: 360 (10%) aged 15-19, 745 (17.5%) aged 20-24, and 845 (19.7%).

<sup>8</sup> “Ward Profiles 2021,” p. 2.

UYES! is a unique partnership of non-profit organizations with significant experience in terms of youth, education, employment, and homelessness issues. Three core agencies – the Saint John Human Development Council (HDC), the Teen Resource Centre (TRC), and the Saint John Learning Exchange (SJLE) – and affiliated community partners such as Outflow Ministry and the Saint John Community Loan Fund<sup>9</sup> each contribute specific services through an array of community and governmental supports.

This phase of UYES! builds on the significant experience garnered during an earlier, federally-funded phase between March 2018 and March 2020. Its results were very encouraging. Out of 202 participants:

- ❑ 55 transitioned into full or part-time employment;
- ❑ 41 moved into mainstream education programs (e.g., post-secondary, high school, or alternative programs);
- ❑ 24 achieved their GED or Adult High School Diploma;
- ❑ 63 completed 98 credits toward their Adult High School Diploma; and
- ❑ others continued to make progress towards their education and employment goals.

In the spirit of continuous learning and improvement, UYES! has strengthened its ability to meet the needs of youth by the following means:

- ❑ Integration of more comprehensive resources, particularly to address housing and mental health challenges.
- ❑ Efforts to achieve specific policy adjustments (e.g., increasing from 20 to 25 the maximum age at which youth can obtain an Adult High School Diploma, and enabling youth under 19 to sign an apartment lease).
- ❑ Invitations to youth to advise on the design of UYES! and to assist staff in the ongoing amelioration of programs and services.
- ❑ The addition of a youth engagement pillar complementary to those of education and employment. Its purpose is to help youth build confidence, project management skills, and networks by exercising leadership in community projects.
- ❑ Simplification of the “youth stages and phases” framework. Experience has demonstrated that the nature and intensity of supports depend more on a participant than on a phase.
- ❑ The continuous development and enhancement of community partnerships and networks by all project staff. This ensures that youth are aware of program opportunities, employers are familiar with the project, and service provision is more effective and professional.
- ❑ Better tracking, reporting, and review of all systems and structures. This has enabled greater accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, including the addition of comprehensive coaching, improvements to barrier navigation, and the streamlining of supports required by youth during the program and follow-up.

---

<sup>9</sup> Recently renamed Kaleidoscope Social Impact.



## About the Evaluation

This evaluation report covers the 15-month period from July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021. It examines both the design of the initiative and its impact. The evaluation does not review specific programs offered to participants by UYES! partners (e.g., GOALS, Outflow, or WorkLinks). The purpose of the evaluation is to communicate the results of this innovative and adaptive program and to serve as a guide in strengthening approaches that impact youth employment and education in Saint John and beyond.

The evaluation uses data from the following sources:

- ❑ A comprehensive data management system (called Outcome Tracker). It encompasses youth participation in programs, progress in achieving employment and education goals, specific barriers (including participants' mental health and housing situation), financial interventions and incentives, and referrals to other community and government partners.
- ❑ Case studies that track a sample of participating youth.
- ❑ Team workshops held in April 2021 and December 2021 in order to reflect on observations and results.
- ❑ Quarterly staff reports and discussions.

*The purpose of the evaluation is to communicate the results of this innovative and adaptive program and to serve as a guide in strengthening approaches to effect youth employment and education in Saint John and beyond.*

The following page provides a quick reference to the key components of the UYES! initiative.



*UYES! team, MP Wayne Long, and Carpentry Training Program participants, 2021.*



## Key UYES! Components

PILLARS	<p><b>Education:</b> Participants can earn an Adult High School Diploma through attending the GOALS class at the Saint John Learning Exchange (see pp. 13 and 15 for details). They can also receive post-secondary coaching, attend short programs at the local community college, study carpentry, build entrepreneurial and financial literacy skills, and be supported by a case manager as they complete a mainstream high school program.</p>
	<p><b>Employment:</b> Young people in this pillar can work with a job coach and job developer to prepare for and then retain employment; they can complete 20-week carpentry training including a paid work term that may lead to college enrolment, apprenticeship, or a job in the trades; they also have the option of honing workplace essential skills in a hands-on program. Interested youth may be referred to an affiliated social enterprise to complete a co-op placement, internship, or to gain paid employment.</p>
	<p><b>Youth Engagement:</b> Participants can engage in projects aligned with their interests and goals, while building skills, networks, confidence and community. Several successful projects were completed in 2021, including a photography project in affiliation with a local arts centre and university, a youth-led catering company that operated a stall at a farmers market, and a series of ongoing workshops teaching independent living skills like cooking, budgeting, and approaches to collective living.</p>
BARRIERS	<p>Youth entering the project are often navigating multiple barriers, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• housing insecurity</li> <li>• mental health (anxiety, depression, anger, suicidal thoughts, addiction)</li> <li>• food security</li> <li>• transportation</li> <li>• poverty</li> <li>• limited family support</li> <li>• mistrust of services</li> <li>• a criminal record.</li> </ul>
SUPPORTS	<p><b>Wraparound supports</b> help youth navigate barriers and manage challenging situations, enabling them to enter and stay in programming, and better positioning them to achieve the goals they have set.</p>

**Case Management and Coaching:** UYES! staff work with youth to identify their short and long-term employment, education, and personal goals. A strong, supportive, and open relationship helps youth become more confident, committed, and successful.

**Mental Health Outreach Coordination** provides on-site mental health support to youth. This is a low-barrier service which means it is responsive to the needs of youth with little to no wait time.

For detailed information about each component of the project, please see Appendix A, pp. 12-24.



## SECTION TWO: PROGRAM IMPACTS

### Program Impacts on Education and Employment

**The results are encouraging.** The number of youth participating in the program is higher than expected. Their involvement reflects a high level of commitment, and the feedback from youth is very positive. The numbers below detail how many UYES! participants are transitioning into full- or part-time employment and achieving educational milestones through credits towards or achievement of the AHSD. For the period from July 2020 to September 2021:

#### Education

- ❑ 32 (of a total of 212) participants achieved their New Brunswick AHSD.
- ❑ 97 participants completed 214 credits toward their AHSD.
- ❑ Two youth are engaged in post-secondary coaching and 15 are in the application or exploration phase for post-secondary education.

#### Employment

- ❑ 67 UYES! participants have jobs; 62 became employed after they started UYES!. Five had jobs prior to starting.
- ❑ All are low-wage jobs. (Only one job has wages over \$20/hour.)
- ❑ 14 of 65 youth who identified housing challenges were able to get a job.
- ❑ 19 have been employed for six months and 29 have been employed for three months.
- ❑ 72 youth received post-employment support from WorkLinks.

*For many participants, UYES! is a long term and comprehensive program. The average length of participation in UYES! is 232 days. Program success requires a high level of engagement and commitment from UYES! participants.*

For many participants, UYES! is a long term and comprehensive program. The average length of participation in UYES! is 232 days. Program success requires a high level of engagement and commitment from UYES! participants. The duration is influenced by a number of factors:

- ❑ The time to achieve an AHSD ranges from 10 weeks to 18 months, particularly for youth entering with no credits.
- ❑ The programming is comprehensive. At UYES!, youth can transition through education and employment programs to build skills, strengthen their personal readiness and develop achievable action plans for employment or post-secondary education, and receive follow-up support for six months.





*UYES! participant  
Matthieu Trenholm,  
soon starting college to  
study welding.*

- ❑ Progress can be hampered by many barriers, including housing, anxiety, limited personal supports, and poverty. Support is most effective when it is designed with an understanding of where youth are at. It directly addresses the needs that youth experience when they enter a program, then builds from this point incrementally, reflecting their own perception of what they really need.
- ❑ The Covid-19 pandemic has affected in-class days. Its impact on the program overall is less than expected, however.

Case management, coaching, and follow-up are tools, just like incentives and financial interventions. All are key to the progress of youth who are on the journey to sustainable employment.

A small number of youth exited due to lack of engagement. This is in stark contrast to the fact that 100% of GOALS participants received honoraria in recognition of their achievement of individualized goals.

## **UYES! and Partnerships**

UYES! is a catalyst for new and stronger partnerships that better meet the needs of at-risk youth. Their ultimate goal is to enable youth to focus on setting and achieving their education and employment goals.

A number of partnerships have been developed recently to provide safe and affordable housing options for youth and are described on p. 23 of this document: the Housing First pilot project that includes wraparound supports for youth; and participation in the By Names List Committee in order to promote the needs of youth and to establish links with landlords interested in renting them housing.

The state of mental health among youth is of great concern to project staff. The introduction of an on-site outreach worker at the Teen Resource Centre is proving to be a very conducive, inviting, and accessible support. Agencies such as Peer SJ provide mental health programming for youth. It is now developing GOALS curriculum to destigmatize the subject of mental health, to help youth distinguish good mental health from poor, and to develop some basic coping strategies.

The relationship with Anglophone South School District has enabled the accreditation of UYES! programs for youth as old as 25 so they can achieve their Adult High School Diploma. The school district has also been helpful in providing space options when Covid dictated a need for greater social distancing in class.

For youth with limited work experience and networks, UYES! has developed strong connections with employers from a broad range of sectors. This makes it possible to provide youth with opportunities that may match their interests. More importantly, these relationships enable UYES! to become a bridge between the needs of employers and the skills of youth, so participants can be better prepared for the world of work.

*For youth with limited work experience and networks, UYES! has developed strong connections with employers from a broad range of sectors. These relationships enable UYES! to become a bridge between the needs of employers and the skills of youth, so participants can be better prepared for the world of work.*



*Participant Kyle Hamm, who earned his Adult High School Diploma through UYES! and is now in the Carpentry Program.*

## CONCLUSION: UYES! IS ACHIEVING RESULTS

UYES! was established on the premise that the integrated delivery of low-barrier, high-support programs by multiple community partners would enable youth with complex needs to realize better outcomes in terms of gaining employment and/or pursuing further education. Results show that UYES! is well on its way to achieving the deliverables in terms of participation, education, and employment over the period 2020-2023.

The original target for UYES! was 150 youth over three years. This number has been surpassed, with 212 youth after 15 months.<sup>10</sup> The majority started in 2020 with 28 added in 2021; only a small number of youth were exited due to lack of engagement. This high level of youth engagement reflects a thorough intake process that identified youth who were ready to make the commitment. The average length of stay was 232 days. A lengthy period of time was required to support youth in overcoming their barriers and in making progress towards their education and employment goals. In turn, youth embraced the opportunity to do so, recognizing how essential it is to securing employment or pursuing post-secondary education.

Over the three-year period it was expected that 45 youth would return to school and after 15 months UYES! was on track. Thirty-two youth had achieved their Adult High School Diploma, over 100 were making progress in obtaining credits towards it, and 11 more were in high school. A small number (2) had gone on to post-secondary education while 15 youth were exploring the opportunity with staff. Others were considering post-secondary education but at that point only as a future option.

Progress was also being made towards the three-year target of 90 youth becoming employed or self-employed. After 18 months, 67 participants were employed. Follow-up with those accessing the Learning Exchange's employment programs indicate that 19 had been employed for six months and 29 for three months. Almost all youth were in precarious, low-wage employment. This reinforces the importance of follow-up coaching in order to maintain employment and build the employees' resumes. There were also opportunities for youth to be placed with employers and gain on-the-job experience and feedback on their work ethic.

Access to safe and affordable housing remained a major barrier for youth and a small number (17) had been housed accordingly. UYES! staff themselves had developed a number of community partnerships that prioritize housing for youth or even provide additional housing options for youth. Efforts were also underway at the policy level to improve young people's access to housing options.

Mental health outreach coordination has shown itself to be integral to the provision of on-site, individualized support for youth in a non-threatening and immediate manner. It is a valuable addition to the

---

<sup>10</sup> Technically, the second phase of UYES! ran from April 2020 through September 2021, or 18 months. In fact, activities began in July 2020, after the lockdown due to the pandemic, for a total of 15 months.



array of wraparound supports. The expertise of the outreach coordinator also enabled a more interdisciplinary approach to discerning the best ways for case managers and other staff to support youth.

UYES! best serves youth who are ready and able to commit to programming. As a large number of participants progress through UYES! programs (over 300 between April 2020 and December 2021), patterns are emerging in regard to the pathways that young people may take. Some need a high intensity of support. Their participation in one or more of the pillars requires that they receive sustained coaching, case management, and outreach support plus financial supports to help mitigate barriers. There are also youth whose participation is low in intensity. They are accessing programming, and may receive incentives and/or light intervention support from time to time. Overall, however, they are more than ready to participate in programming.

Several key features help to drive the program's success:

- ❑ Comprehensive supports from case managers, integrated coaching, on-site mental health supports, and rapid-response financial interventions and goal-based financial incentives.
- ❑ Easy-to-access, flexible programs that place youth at the center.
- ❑ High priority given to addressing housing challenges and mental health concerns.
- ❑ A wraparound network of supports to help youth set and achieve both personal and employment goals.
- ❑ High level of trust shared between UYES! partners and the community.

UYES! is on track to meet the targets for education and employment results set with Employment and Social Development Canada, the lead department for the YESS initiative. The core team of Human Development Council, Saint John Learning Exchange, and Teen Resource Centre continue to work well together and have built strong relationships in the community to better address gaps in services, supports, and opportunities for youth.

A photograph of four people on a stage. From left to right: a man in a white shirt and glasses, a woman in a gold sequined dress, a woman in a purple patterned shirt, and a woman in a blue sweater and scarf. They are all wearing face masks. The woman in the gold dress is holding a trophy. The background is a blue curtain.

*FAR Away Kitchen  
receiving PRUDE Inc.'s  
Diversity Champion  
Award, October 2021.*

*UYES! was established on the premise that the integrated delivery of low-barrier, high-support programs by multiple community partners would enable youth with complex needs to realize better outcomes. Results show that UYES! is well on its way to achieving deliverables in terms of participation, education, and employment over the period 2020-2023.*

## APPENDIX A: THE UYES! PROGRAM MODEL

### Theory of Change

The change model for UYES! incorporates the features of the newly-integrated federal Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) along with additional components to meet the needs of at-risk youth. Within the framework of YESS, UYES! has been designed to accomplish the following:

- ❑ Respond to youth aged 15-30 who face varied and complex barriers to employment and/or education.
- ❑ Provide a more holistic and individualized approach, with an initial intake and assessment process as well as follow-up case management supports that leverage additional community-level partnerships to strengthen wraparound supports.
- ❑ Focus on a continuous intake model. Some participants require short-term supports while others require longer-term supports.
- ❑ Provide a broad array of educational programming and pre-employment training and skill development opportunities, including trades training and employment opportunities through existing social enterprises (SEs), co-op placements, and other non-profits.

The purpose of UYES! is to support youth who are not employed or in education/training (NEET) on a change journey of their own making. The premise is that, by providing flexible opportunities to learn, work, and grow personal networks as well as assistance to navigate and surmount personal barriers, youth are empowered to identify and achieve their own, authentic goals in terms of education and employment.



## UYES! Partners and their Contributions

UYES! deliberately links three experienced community agencies: The Teen Resource Centre, the Saint John Learning Exchange, and the Saint John Human Development Council. Their alignment integrates essential supports at the depth and range that youth require, including educational, skill-building, employment preparation, coaching, case management, and referral services. The level of collaboration between the partners continues to produce new ways of supporting youth that could not have been accomplished by a single organization. To the same end, UYES! also leverages collaboration from a number of other community and government partners.

Partner	Description	Role in UYES! Collaboration	Dedicated Staff*
Human Development Council (HDC)	Identifies and addresses social issues in Greater Saint John through research, information, coordination, and networking.	Principal architect of UYES!, the HDC is responsible for project implementation, evaluation, and results reporting. It establishes subcontract agreements, coordinates all service-providing agencies, and liaises with government and public audiences.	Project Manager and Administrative Assistant
Saint John Learning Exchange (SJLE)	Provides comprehensive education, skill-building (literacy, workplace essential skills, GED), pre-employment, and employment programs.	Facilitates educational programming, including a dedicated classroom for youth aged 16-20 and options for youth aged 21-25 (awarding credits towards high school diploma), GED preparation, individualized coaching and incentivized goal-setting, and pre-employment training and skill development. Provides workplace experiences within its social enterprises (including co-op placements for high school credit) and facilitates connections with employers. Coordinates the tracking of all participants through the database.	GOALS Instructor, GOALS Tutor, and Program Director
The Teen Resource	Provides a safe and encouraging	Coordinates intake and assessment. Provides follow-up case management	Three case managers (one



Centre (TRC)	environment for youth to explore their full potential, including supportive counselling and employment and educational supports.	and supports as long as youth need them. Provides on-site mental health support services. Links youth to community and government services, as well as financial interventions appropriate to youth needs. Provides youth engagement programming.	of whom is a youth engagement specialist), and one mental health outreach coordinator
--------------	--	---	---

\*Note: Some staff work full-time for UYES! and others only part-time.

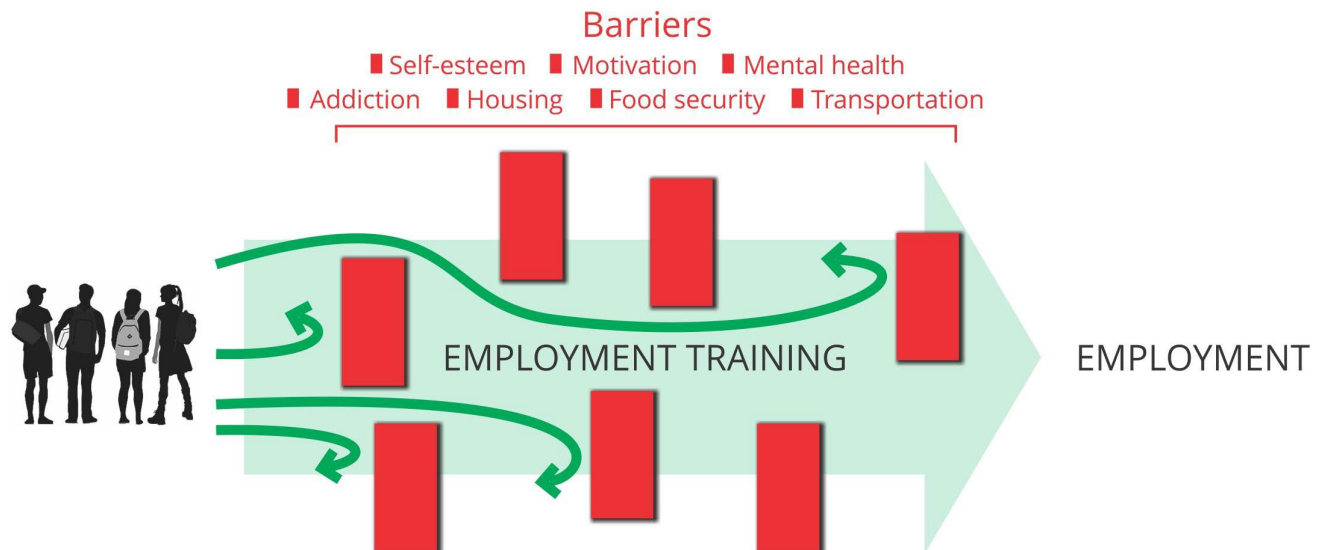


*Noah Comeau is a student in the GOALS program, working towards earning an Adult High School Diploma.*

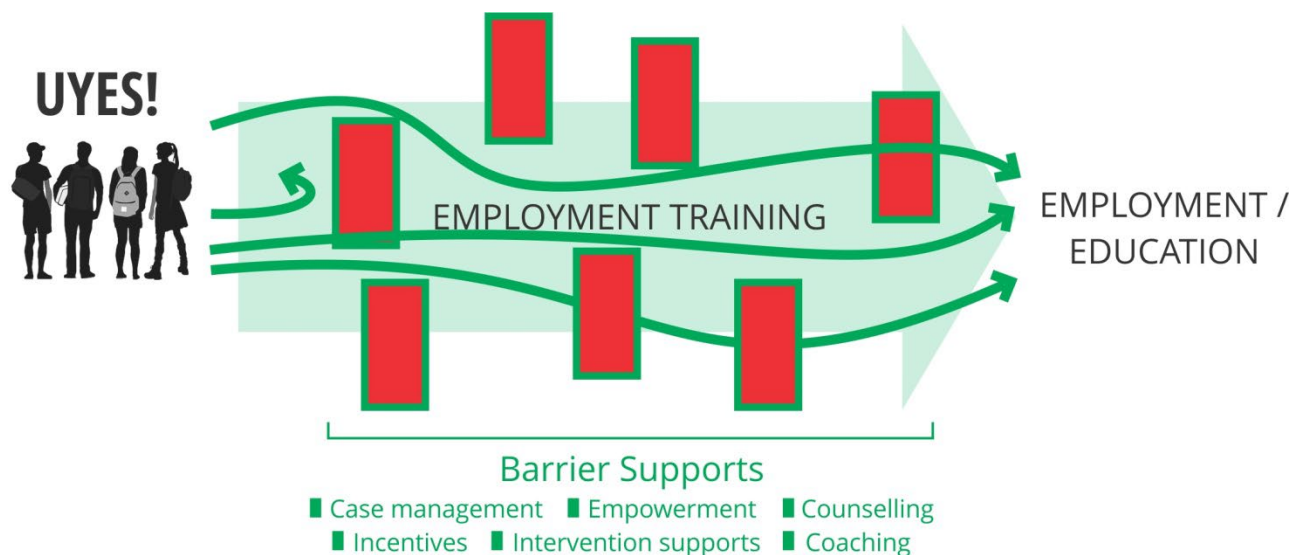
## Program Components of UYES!

The innovative model of UYES! is depicted below, outlining the comprehensive supports required to change the trajectory for multi-barriered, at-risk youth to one of hope and opportunity.

In theory, employment training will enable jobless young people to join the workforce and remain there. In fact, a number of barriers stop youth from getting and keeping jobs, or from participating in employment training.



UYES! supplements employment training with an array of supports that enable youth to manage, overcome, or avoid barriers.



UYES! is designed to meet the educational and employment needs of youth while simultaneously responding to their personal barriers and challenges. Each participant identifies and establishes their own goals and how the program can support them. The model recognizes that youth have different levels of readiness for moving forward, and provides the programs and supports as needed.

A number of distinguishing features position UYES! to respond more effectively to the immediate needs of youth:

- ❑ Individualized wraparound supports through case management and mental health coordination to build trust and commitment. This can reduce or eliminate the need for external referrals and for troubleshooting with the justice system.
- ❑ Flexibility and adaptation of employment and educational services with coaching supports to respond to the needs of youth.
- ❑ Low-barrier entry to enable youth to transition seamlessly between programs and services depending on their situation.
- ❑ Rapid response with financial interventions to assist with barriers, particularly in areas related to transportation, food security, and housing.
- ❑ Goal-based financial incentives provided by the employment and educational programs.
- ❑ Integral to UYES! is follow-up for youth who become employed or enter post-secondary education.
- ❑ Navigation of the complex system of government and community services in order to better respond to the needs of youth.

Transitioning to long-term sustainable employment is the central and long-term focus of UYES! It offers a comprehensive array of core employment and educational programs that continue to be modified as needed to respond to the needs of youth. A third pillar, youth engagement, was added. It builds the confidence and networking skills of youth to take action on opportunities that correspond to their interests.

*Transitioning to long-term sustainable employment is the central focus of UYES! It offers a comprehensive array of core employment and educational programs that continue to be modified as needed to respond to the needs of youth. A third pillar, Youth Engagement, builds the confidence and networking skills of youth to take action on opportunities that correspond to their interests.*

### **Education Pillar**

Growing Occupational, Academic, and Life Skills (GOALS), a program unique to Saint John Learning Exchange, acts as an alternative high school setting for youth aged 16-25. Youth in this classroom achieve high school credits in a hands-on, project-based environment and receive incentives for participation, goal achievement, and attendance. This program is the central component of the UYES! education pillar and is steeped in building skills necessary for success in the workforce. While participating in GOALS, all youth also build their soft skills through individual and group activities, participate in individualized coaching and goal-setting, and explore career opportunities.





GOALS offers several flexible schooling options for youth, including a group-based program in which up to 10 students move through the course material at the same pace, working on individually-paced packages, and virtual schooling. Although most participants are aged 16-20, the local school district allows GOALS to support learners up until the age of 25. Older youth (up to 30) can also access academic programs to work towards their GED or to increase literacy, numeracy, and/or other essential skills.

Academic accreditation is available from the school district. Participants aged 16-25 earn credits towards an Adult High School Diploma (AHSD)<sup>11</sup> in both GOALS (SJLE) and the Carpentry Training Program (Outflow). The Learning Exchange also partners with other organizations to offer credits tailored to the needs of youth. For example, Peer SJ, a local organization offering mental health supports for youth, has delivered a credit course in mental health to GOALS learners. Completing an AHSD opens up opportunities for employment (where high school is required) and/or entry to post-secondary education, most notably at New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) and University of New Brunswick.

One UYES! community partner, Outflow Ministry, is a faith-based charity that works with individuals living in poverty to address unemployment and homelessness. It provides basic carpentry and construction skills training to UYES! youth. The carpentry training modules are recognized by the school district for a high school credit.

---

<sup>11</sup> The AHSD is an accelerated version of a high school diploma offered only in the Province of New Brunswick. UYES! is unique in offering this option in a community setting with wraparound supports.

As part of the education continuum, UYES! offers participants post-secondary coaching to help youth navigate the often confusing (and even overwhelming) process of choosing a program area of study. The coaching addresses such matters as identifying prerequisites, applying to post-secondary institutions, securing funding, and beginning post-secondary programming. In the summer of 2021, staff worked with NBCC to offer a five-day “Trades Exploration” program to nine UYES! participants. The program clarified different career options in the trades, the skills required, and the financial and other supports available for each. One participant enrolled immediately and remains in the program; another has since enrolled and plans to commence studies soon. When UYES! participants enrol in post-secondary programs, coaching extends to the end of their first semester of study to support youth and to aid in retention.

UYES! youth attending mainstream high schools are also provided with wraparound services to encourage retention.

Some GOALS participants are simultaneously engaged in employment programming, in order to secure employment immediately.

### ***Employment Pillar***

Three UYES! employment programs – WESLinks, WorkLinks, and the Carpentry Training Program – provide youth with job-ready skills, on-the-job training, and opportunities for internships, apprenticeship preparation, and job coaching. Together, these resources and services prepare youth to acquire and retain employment.

#### **WESLinks**

In WESLinks, youth participate in a Soft Skills Series to build the confidence as well as the skills essential to success in the workforce. These must-haves include communication, collaboration, time management, stress management, problem solving, professionalism, confidence, and conflict resolution. For example, many participants are building their capacity to manage a schedule and remain reliable regardless of the challenges they face. Skill development in this area frequently calls for intensive coaching. The participants also learn how to develop a resume and then upgrade it with recent experiences of relevance to a job interview. The WESLink training environment emphasizes project-based and hands-on learning opportunities.

An example of a WESLinks project is the operation of a food pantry at the Learning Exchange. Participants manage the pantry’s inventory and budget, stock the shelves, and track how often the pantry is accessed. They practice customer service skills by surveying learners about items they want to see included in the pantry. Every month participants also prepare a bag supper and deliver it to learners in various programs to help them meet challenges in food security. WESLinks is a stepping stone toward securing employment, especially for youth who have not worked before and who need to build routine and accountability into their lives in preparation for employment.

## WorkLinks

Through WorkLinks, youth receive individualized coaching, assistance with resume- and cover letter-writing, and interview preparation. If appropriate, they are also connected to local employers offering jobs for which participants are eligible to apply. An individual employment action plan is created and youth receive intensive coaching around the barriers that they may face as they transition to work. A significant amount of

time is spent preparing participants for this transition and discussing the realities of work. Youth set their own employment goals based on their abilities and interests and receive support from the WorkLinks Team to achieve these goals.

*The social enterprises of UYES! partners provide a small number of youth with eight weeks of co-op placement, matching the interests of youth with the capacity of the business. This on-the-job training experience (e.g., building confidence and soft skills such as teamwork and communication) make youth better prepared for the world of work.*

When a participant gets hired, supports continue for the first six months of employment. To promote retention, the youth are encouraged to check in regularly to navigate any challenges that come up during the early stages of employment.

UYES! partners have developed relationships with 77 different employers in the private, non-profit, social enterprise, and government sectors. These are employers who are open to receiving referrals from WorkLinks staff for permanent employment opportunities. The job developer identifies the needs of employers and seeks a match from UYES! participants, based on their area of interest and skills and refers youth to the employer. Candidates still must go through the standard recruitment process, but the referral helps to set their applications apart from others. This is particularly advantageous for youth with limited experience. Some youth who are able to access employment opportunities on their own may still receive help preparing for the job search process.

## Partnering with Social Enterprises

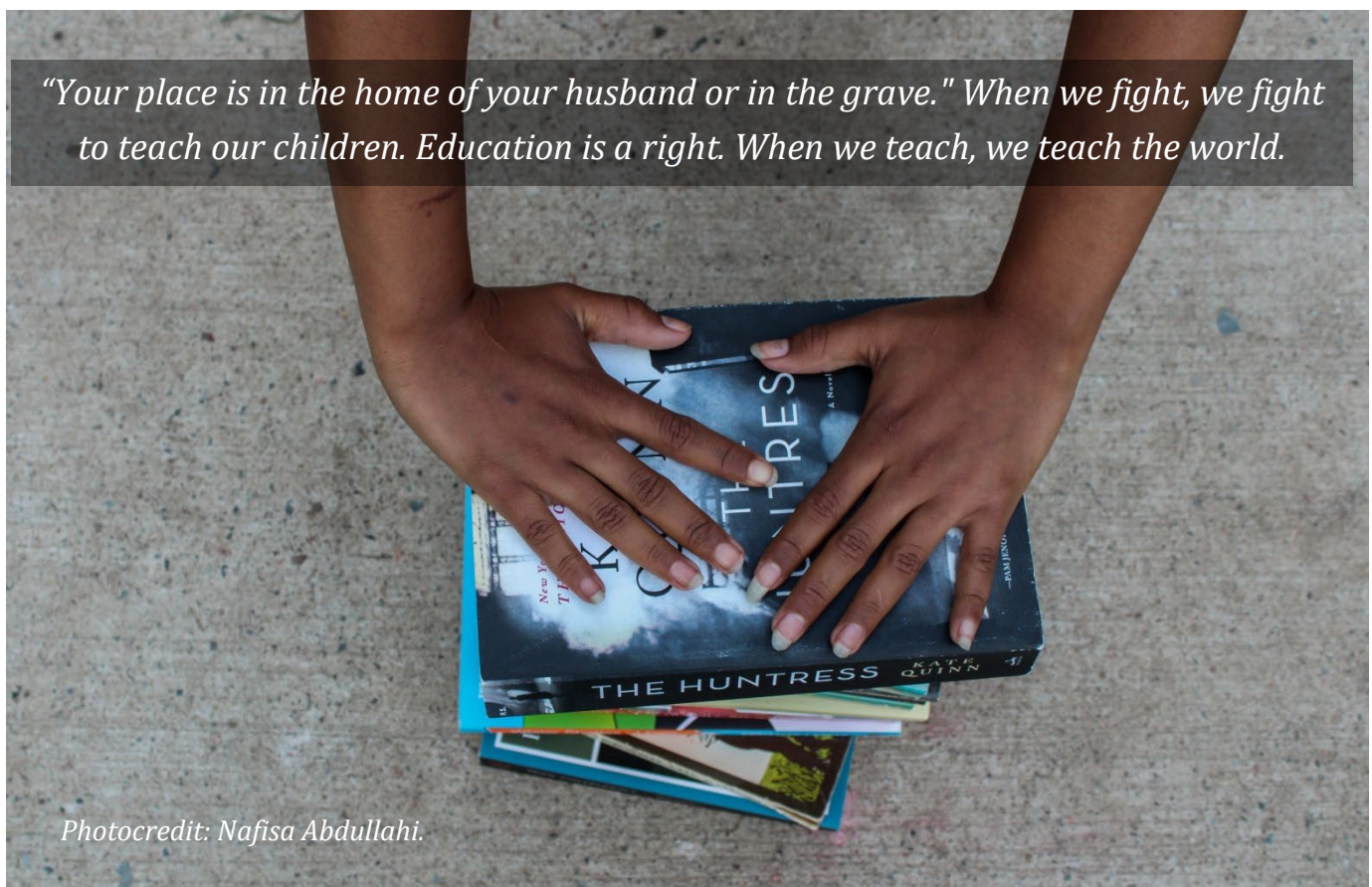
The social enterprises of UYES! partners provide a small number of youth with eight weeks of co-op placement, matching the interests of youth with the capacity of the business. This on-the-job training experience (e.g., building confidence and soft skills such as teamwork and communication) make youth better prepared for the world of work. It can be particularly instrumental to youth as WorkLinks receives feedback on their performance that can then be shared with them. Interested GOALS and WESLinks participants are placed in the social enterprises of the Learning Exchange (Voila! Essentials, Voila! Cleaning, and Stone Soup Café and Catering). Carpentry Training Program participants are able to work with Outflow's social enterprise, Catapult Construction, in an 8-week paid work term subsidized by WorkingNB.



## Youth Engagement Pillar

Youth Engagement is a relatively new pillar that continues to develop as UYES! is implemented. The focus of this pillar is the creation of opportunities for youth to express their experiences of the city, invite others to learn from these experiences, and together with them, challenge the status quo. A process of self-discovery is launched through which staff promote a positive sense of self, a sense of purpose, agency, and creative inspiration. Projects undertaken in this pillar address the need for meaningful transformative experiences with youth. The creation of resilient environments brings youth the ability to learn, make mistakes, and explore vulnerability. What is essential is that projects are enticing to youth, meet them where they are at, and give them a chance to make choices over what is communicated, explored, and valued.

One example is the i-Click photography project, that involves storytelling through photography. Its first run in Saint John back in 2019 was so successful, it attracted the attention of the University of New Brunswick. The university then partnered with the Teen Resource Centre and the Saint John Arts Centre to run this project again and research its impact. Over the summer of 2021, eight youth (all newcomers) learned photography skills while exploring ideas about themselves, their cultural heritage, and the parts of their stories that might be important for the larger community to understand and learn about. The project was accepted into the Third Shift Art Festival in Saint John; the inspiring storytelling of each participant was showcased at the Saint John City Market.





*FAR Away Kitchen participants and entrepreneurs.*

A second example of youth engagement is FAR Away Kitchen. A group of newcomer teens came together because of their common love of food. After receiving mentorship at the Teen Resource Centre, they started to host lunches, run cooking lessons, and created their own catering venture dedicated to sharing culture through food. In the summer of 2021, they achieved a milestone goal of being part Saint John's Queen Square Farmer's Market and were thrilled to receive the Diversity Champion Award in October 2021.

Projects on the horizon include the development of a youth engagement curriculum for the GOALS program, and independent living skills initiatives to engage youth who have been struggling with housing instability. This pillar is a means by which youth can build confidence, project management skills, and networks through leadership initiatives that align with their needs, interests, and passions.

### ***Participation in Pillars***

The extensive list of programs offered through the three pillars constitutes an integrated approach to building the employability and academic skills of youth. The 212 UYES! participants responded as follows:

- ❑ 145 or 68% participated in education programs (132 in GOALS, 4 in GED, 2 in post-secondary, and 11 attending mainstream high school).
- ❑ They devoted an average of 131 days to education programming.
- ❑ 115 or 54% participated in employment programs (95 in WorkLinks, 4 in WESLinks, 13 in Outflow).
- ❑ They devoted an average of 132 days to employment programs between UYES! intake and starting a job.
- ❑ 14 or 6% participated in youth engagement. This small number is due to the fact that the program is new and developing.

Some youth were active in more than one pillar.

## **Wraparound supports**

The UYES! team works to ensure that the environment is welcoming, respectful, and responsive – all features that are vital to attracting and retaining youth. What sets UYES! apart is its ability to assist with barriers, to connect individuals to the right community resource, and to help youth set and achieve goals. All these are integral to supporting participation and progress. Because many youth have a limited support network, the value-added of the UYES! model continues to be its capacity to respond *immediately* to their needs with wraparound supports – guidance, counselling, coaching, follow-up, and advocacy. Wraparound supports were provided in three different ways:

- ❑ Case Management (46 participants)
- ❑ Coaching (121 participants)
- ❑ Mental health outreach support (25 participants)

Participants may receive support from more than one of the above.

### **Case Management**

The provision of intensive case management is primarily the role of three case managers at the Teen Resource Centre. Case managers provide a continuous and consistent point of contact for youth throughout their participation in UYES!, starting with the initial intake assessment. Their role is comprehensive and flexible depending on the needs of participants and their readiness to accept assistance. They connect with youth through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and various forms of social media, particularly Facebook and texting. The frequency of one-on-one sessions, regular follow-ups, and check-ins increases to provide more support during highly stressful situations, such as a housing crisis, court proceedings, or mental health issues. Over time, as trust and understanding grow between youth and their case manager, the picture of participants' needs and barriers becomes more complete.

The intensity of case management supports can vary. In a snapshot of case manager activities between April and September 2021, the monthly average showed that:

- ❑ 50% of youth needed on average one meeting per week;
- ❑ 28% of youth required at least two meetings a week; and
- ❑ 22% of youth needed three or more meetings per week.

### **Coaching**

Coaching is mainly conducted by staff at the Learning Exchange as they assist youth in setting and achieving goals related to their education and employment. Coaching also involves helping youth with goals related to their health, finances, relationships, or other personal matters that will improve their chances of success in terms of a career. Coaching can be time intensive, for example, when staff are helping a youth through a crisis situation.



At the Learning Exchange a culture of coaching<sup>12</sup> is integral to all programming. For example, in GOALS, youth participate in individualized coaching and goal-setting and explore career opportunities. In WorkLinks, they receive individualized coaching as they work through the transition to employment.

### **Mental Health Outreach Coordination**

Mental health coordination, a new service established in 2021, is provided by a staff member who is located on-site at the Teen Resource Centre. This individual works closely with case managers. Their proximity to the GOALS classroom and to the subsidized housing units enables the outreach coordinator to respond quickly to youth who are in crisis and may distrust other service providers. Youth have immediate access to a safe, supportive space in which to explore their worth and dive into their past and their present in a healthy way. The coordinator also brings a more interdisciplinary, team approach to the provision of supports.

In general, this on-site service delivery is far preferable to the off-site alternative. Placing youth on a waiting list for a community service is discouraging and puts them at greater risk (of self harm, for example). Now, youth who had previously refused to attend counselling off-site have started attending sessions with the outreach coordinator. This has reduced the need for referrals to other resources in the community.<sup>13</sup>

The intensity of outreach supports varies. Of the UYES! participants who received support,

- ❑ 36% received 10+ hours;
- ❑ 12% received 2-10 hours; and
- ❑ 52% received 1-2 hours.

Overall, of 136 participants who received 30 minutes or more of a combination of coaching, case management, and outreach support,

- ❑ 96 or 71% are in employment programming;
- ❑ 82 or 60% are in education programming; and
- ❑ 59 or 43% are employed.

This shows how key a role the wraparound supports play for youth in all aspects of UYES!.

Through case management, coaching, and outreach coordination, UYES! team members support youth in setting and achieving goals, and helping to remove or manage the barriers that they face. The close

---

<sup>12</sup> Learning Exchange staff have been trained in non-directive coaching through Essential Impact, an internationally award winning corporate coaching company based in Vancouver that customizes the development and sustaining of its coaching strategies to the objectives of an organization's culture.

<sup>13</sup> That being said, some youth already have a relationship with off-site resources, with which they may be connected instead. Two important examples are Peers Engaged in Education and Recovery (PEER SJ), a community-based service in Saint John, and Integrated Service Delivery (ISD), which is supplied through the school district.

integration of wraparound components helps to connect youth to appropriate services at short notice. This is especially important when youth do not identify their barriers during intake interviews or when these barriers change (e.g., housing that quickly morphs from “precarious” to “unstable”).

Youth may require supports that are beyond the expertise of UYES!. In these cases, referrals are required, or close collaboration with other government and community services. Youth Enhancement Services, a program of New Brunswick’s Department of Social Development, delivers support services to young people, as well as a monthly income and helps with such specific needs as transportation, food, and clothing. All participants in GOALS are connected to a local high school.

### ***Financial interventions and incentives***

Wraparound supports are further strengthened by the capacity of UYES! to provide financial interventions and goal-based financial incentives. Financial interventions help to stabilize a young person’s situation. Case managers are able to respond immediately to specific needs of youth, such as providing gift cards for food, bus passes, assistance in obtaining official identification, financial support for youth engagement project work, as well as housing supports. These interventions do not remove barriers, but they can alleviate challenging situations sufficiently to enable someone to participate in UYES! programs. In some situations, youth respond better, knowing that they do not have to develop a plan to resolve an issue or barrier by themselves.

*Staff started cooking dinners at the rooming house. Soon youth began requesting specific meals and are now engaged, taking on the cooking of dinners with the ingredients supplied by staff. A unique opportunity to spend time together in a positive and fulfilling way.*

❑ \$48,994 in financial interventions was distributed to 28 or 13% of UYES! participants.

All UYES! core program staff in the education and employment programs work with youth to identify and set achievable goals and to see the value in small steps as well as large steps. Youth receive financial incentives or honoraria based on the achievement of these goals. The goals are individualized and reflect the readiness and commitment of youth to move forward. Goal-based incentives, in the form of cash payments, are used both to encourage and reward participation and accomplishments. Participant feedback confirms how important these incentives have been to the achievement of their goals and to setting new ones.

❑ \$110,133 in honoraria was distributed to 132 or 100% of youth enrolled in the GOALS program.

### ***Housing***

Safe, stable, and affordable housing is integral to the ability of youth to participate and progress through UYES! Many UYES! participants experience housing insecurity, which includes sleeping rough, couch surfing, accessing shelters, living in unsafe conditions, and paying unsustainable rent. The cost of rent is steadily on

the rise; so is the number of landlords who return rent subsidies in order to secure clients with a higher income level. As a result, the inaccessibility of housing is becoming a crisis for many residents of Saint John. For youth, the crisis is exacerbated by complex rental applications, an inability to access subsidized housing or subsidies, and the unwillingness of many landlords to rent to a younger clientele.

During the period covered by this evaluation, UYES! staff found housing for 17 youth, either by connecting them with a rental unit or room or by helping them to access a rent subsidy. But the housing needs of the UYES! target populations are significant and changing. Of 101 youth who accessed services at the Teen Resource Centre and Learning Exchange from January to March 2021, 60 or 59% had insecure housing. At one point in time, 21% identified housing as a barrier, but as their relationships with various UYES! staff developed, the number evidently increased. A more accurate number, according to staff, is that 65 or 28% of the 212 UYES! participants have identified housing challenges.

In 2021, a partnership between the Learning Exchange, Teen Resource Centre, and Housing Alternatives Inc.<sup>14</sup> received funding to pilot a Housing First approach to house up to 35 youth aged 15-30 who are struggling with insecure housing. Participants receive financial subsidies for their rent and case management support. The Housing First approach is testing the hypothesis that housing stability will support better education and employment outcomes for youth, especially when they are in charge of their own case plan. It also focuses on strengthening their independent living skills, including cooking, cleaning, and creating safe spaces.

While not all Housing First youth are connected to UYES!, a number have enrolled because of the stability that the pilot has brought to their housing situation. A partnership with University of New Brunswick Saint John is evaluating this two-year initiative. The three partners are working with the provincial Department of Social Development to address specific policy barriers within the Department, including the minimum age at which people can access subsidies and sign rental agreements.

Another avenue is being explored through the participation of a UYES! case manager in a “By Names List Committee”. This body, led by the Human Development Council, connects individuals to housing opportunities. UYES! participation in the committee may shed light on the extent of youth homelessness and housing precarity, and help to identify solutions. It could also be useful for identifying landlords willing to house youth.

---

<sup>14</sup> A private, non-profit organization providing housing development and management services to housing cooperatives and non-profit housing organizations in southwestern New Brunswick.



## APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

During the period July 2020 to September 2021, the 212 participants in UYES! had the following characteristics:

- ❑ an average age of 20.
- ❑ 61% identified as male, 26% as female and 5% as 2SLGBTQ;<sup>15</sup> 8% preferred not to say.
- ❑ 9% had at least one dependent.
- ❑ 26% identified as coming from generational poverty.
- ❑ 28% expressly identified housing challenges.
- ❑ Approximately 50% came from one of Saint John's five low-income neighbourhoods.
- ❑ 28% identified as having a disability.<sup>16</sup>
- ❑ The majority (73%) had some high school education upon intake; 15% had completed high school and 8% were in post-secondary education.
- ❑ 79% identified as Caucasian, 4% as Black, and 4% as Indigenous.

The rest identified themselves as West Asian, East Asian, Other, or preferred not to say.

*Because they have additional challenges to overcome and fewer resources and supports to draw upon ... [NEET individuals] face a higher risk of doing poorly and not reaching their full potential.*

UYES! serves young people facing significant personal challenges. While involved in coaching and case management during the period covered by this evaluation, youth identified 28 different challenges and 37% of youth identified more than three challenges.

The following challenges were identified by more than one in five youth:

- ❑ Stress/Time Management 36%
- ❑ Transportation 34%
- ❑ Career Change/Employment Gap 34%
- ❑ Mental health (anxiety, depression, anger, suicidal thoughts, addiction) 27%
- ❑ Communication 23%
- ❑ Problem Solving 22%
- ❑ Lack of experience 22%
- ❑ Housing 21%

---

<sup>15</sup> An acronym that stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning people.

<sup>16</sup> Disability is self-defined by youth and refers to physical, emotional, sensory impairment, intellectual, or learning disability.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a helpful framework for understanding what youth need. It also reaffirms the value of the UYES! initiative and its wraparound supports for moving youth towards sustainable employment. While movement up the hierarchy is not predicated on meeting all the needs at any one level, it is important to note that needs of UYES! youth were concentrated in the bottom two categories – “security” and “physiological.” In terms of security needs, UYES! youth face challenges in regard to most of the listed factors: skill level, education and employment experience, technical skills and equipment, and health and well-being. In terms of physiological needs, youth face challenges in regard to housing, transportation, food security, and physical health.

As the needs of youth are met at one level, they are better able to move forward and address the needs at the other levels. For example, youth who achieve their AHSD are shown to have a greater level of confidence in themselves and in their ability to go on to post-secondary education or employment. In addition to facing a significant number of barriers, many youth lack a supportive network outside of UYES!. This, coupled with mental health and housing challenges and the lack of other basic needs, puts significant pressure on youth. Until an individual's basic needs are met they often are unable to focus on aspirational goals of employment or education and realizing the true extent of their potential.

*Many youth lack a supportive network outside of UYES!. This, coupled with mental health and housing challenges and the lack of other basic needs, puts significant pressure on them. Until such basic needs are met they often are unable to focus on aspirational goals of employment or education.*

## APPENDIX C: CASE STUDIES

### Case Studies

This section comprises eight case studies of UYES! youth and the journeys each experienced in and through this initiative. Their lives as both program participants and as community members are described. The cases illustrate the variety of living situations and personal challenges these young people face; the goals they identified as UYES! participants; the progress they made towards these goals; how their lives may be changing; and the role of programs and wraparound supports in these changes.

The cases convey the variety of outcomes that youth experience at UYES! and what progress looks like for them. The studies also provide insight into the design of the initiative and which aspects and components contribute to progress.

These cases were developed from interviews done at six-month intervals over the course of UYES!, as well as from information provided by UYES! staff who were involved with each youth.

Of the eight youth who were interviewed, three were females, four were males, and one was a member of the 2SLGBTQ community. Two cases concern single parents (one with partial custody) and two are about newcomers. Two youth participated in a second, six-month follow-up interview. A third individual who was due for a follow-up could not be reached. In each case, names have been changed to preserve the subjects' privacy.

**Donna** is the single parent of a two-year-old daughter and lives with her parents and three brothers. She balances parenting, school, and employment. Her parents are very supportive; she pays her mother for babysitting and she is pleased with how well her daughter is developing. Donna is grateful for the family she has, especially when she sees others who are not well supported by their families.

Encouraged by friends (her own and her mother's) she enrolled at UYES! in August 2020. She attends GOALS twice a week for four hours and is part of the WorkLinks program at the Learning Exchange. Her instructors, David and Erin, describe her as strong academically and doing double the workload to achieve her credits. She hopes to finish in the next two months. Donna describes herself as a poor student in the regular school system, and would regularly not attend class or complete her homework. When she became pregnant in Grade Ten she dropped out of school. At the Learning Exchange she receives more support to help her understand subject matter. In addition, homework expectations are more flexible. The GOALS program will help her to get her diploma much more quickly as the GED can take much longer.

*Donna's instructors, David and Erin, describe her as strong academically and doing double the workload to achieve her credits.*



At the time of the interview, she had been working 20 - 30 hours a week at an Irving Gas Station for four months. She was referred by a friend and received help with her resume and cover letter from the WorkLinks program. She had previously considered post-secondary training; both of her parents are in the trades. The extra push she needed to apply to NBCC came from a presentation to her GOALS class about goal setting, delivered by staff from the Teen Resource Centre. She has been accepted into the steamfitting/pipefitting program and will start in September 2021. There are few women in this field as compared to other trades areas.

One success has led to another for Donna. She recently achieved her driver's licence. Shy at first, she has become very outgoing. She describes herself as less mean because her future now looks better and she has more confidence in herself. Although Donna was not available for a follow-up interview, she has achieved her AHSD.

**Brad** is a 17-year-old who was homeless and couch surfing. Earlier he had been living with his father in Saskatchewan but that was not a healthy situation, and he wasn't doing well in an alternate school there. He moved to Ontario and finally to Saint John in the fall of 2019. Until recently he and a friend had been living with his mother for a short period of time. He left when it became too chaotic due to her addictions, which were influencing his own issues with addictions. Brad's grandmother lives in town and has custody of his two younger brothers. He helps her with errands.

He connected to the Teen Resource Centre through a friend who was staying at the TRC Rooming House. Brad's case manager, Amelia, helped him access a place at the Rooming House. His friend stayed with him until another room became available. He feels that his case manager is always there for him and he is in contact with her three or four times a week. They connect at the Rooming House or through social media. He appreciates the financial supports, such as food vouchers.

Brad started in UYES! in January 2021. He needs two credits to complete high school; he expects to finish by June. He attends GOALS once a week and although he thinks attending another day would be good, he is fine with it the way it is. He is currently finishing his soft skills credit and then will be going on to achieve his remaining credits. He does very well with his soft skills – he is good at communication, and is very self-aware, kind, and mature. He attributes his progress to the small class size and to the teachers, who get to know you personally in order to help you achieve your goals. He says the teachers see you more as a person

*Brad says the teachers at GOALS see you more as a person than as a student. The pace allows him to focus on other personal aspects of his life, rather than having to do that and a lot of school work too.... Small stresses in his life have been removed, such as being able to lock his door and know that his stuff will be there when he comes back.*



*TRC Case Manager Amelia Bernard  
(left) with UYES! participant and  
college student Britney Moir.*

than as a student. The pace allows him to focus on other personal aspects of his life, rather than having to do that and a lot of school work too. His coach, Alex, has been working with him to set goals for other accomplishments and is helping him get his licence. Having this paid for is very helpful.

Brad recognizes that he is more motivated now than in the past. For example, he is working with his case manager to move into a subsidized two-bedroom apartment for him and his friend. (They will be subsidized for a year.) This was not something he expected to happen. He is eating better, has stopped using harder drugs since September 2020, always pays his rent, and feels he is in a much better environment. Small stresses in his life have been removed, such as being able to lock his door and know that his stuff will be there when he comes back.

Money is tight. Although Brad is interested in working in a grocery store, there are some restrictions due to his involvement with the Youth Enhancement Services Program. It provides financial support for youth aged 16-18 who have not lived in their parental home for at least three months. Youth under this program are only allowed to earn a certain amount. Any additional money needs to be put into a savings account or one's eligibility is terminated.

Brad has had a lot of toxic experiences and really wants to change his life. His anxiety makes it hard to focus on new things and he has never had consistent encouragement. He seems to be developing a more supportive network, with his girlfriend and others. Brad was referred to a private counsellor, but for various reasons his initial appointment has had to be rescheduled. His case manager will see if the outreach coordinator at the Teen Resource Centre can see him.

Brad's goal is to make money and he thinks that in the future he might look at post-secondary education. He is also considering a future in the trades as his father works in the trades and makes a lot of money. He is confident that the Learning Exchange will help him. Although a follow-up interview has not yet taken place, staff shared that Brad achieved his AHSD.

**Prince** talks openly about the benefits of their time at the Learning Exchange, personally, academically and financially. They did not expect to live beyond the age of 16 as they were an addict, in an abusive relationship, receiving minimal family support and, because of their sexuality, felt ostracized by their school in the northern part of the province.

Being a trans non-binary, Prince is finally feeling some acceptance for who they are, something they have wanted for a long time. During their early days with the Learning Exchange, Prince received significant support dealing with fears from an abusive relationship. The Learning Exchange is felt to be a very safe environment where there is no judgment but guidance and support for their sexuality. Prince feels better able to look after themselves; successes contribute to their growing self-confidence and worth. The GOALS soft-skills component of communication and conflict resolution was helpful. Both Prince and the Learning Exchange staff have noted a decrease in "dramatic behaviour" and that Prince seems happy with themselves.

*Alex, Prince's coach and mentor at the Learning Exchange, encouraged them to talk to the employer about changing shifts. Prince did that and have maintained part-time employment for more than eight months.*

At the age of 18, Prince is half-way through achieving the credits needed for the AHSD, attending GOALS eight hours a week. They find the approach of GOALS very conducive to learning and they see progress. If experiencing a tough day, they are able to leave without being penalized. The focus is on taking care of yourself. The laptop provided by the Learning Exchange also helps.

Prince works about eight hours a week at a grocery store, stocking shelves in a long and demanding shift. Money is tight. Help with groceries from the Learning Exchange and encouragement to stay with the job all help. They were thinking of quitting work because of the night shift. Alex, their coach and mentor at the Learning Exchange, encouraged them to talk to the employer about changing shifts. Prince did that and has maintained part-time employment for more than eight months. They are better able to advocate for themselves and are currently working with Alex to legally change their name. Prince has set a goal to get their driver's licence.



Alex also feels that Teen Resource Centre housing would be ideal for Prince economically and emotionally, but pets are not allowed. They experience PTSD from their abusive family. Pets help with their anxiety and one of the staff is working on connecting Prince to a therapy dog.

Alex shared that Prince recently engaged in self-harm activities, but is encouraged because Prince recognized that their potential partner/fiancée was self-harming and a trigger for themselves. They have asked for help with communication and this in itself is a huge step as in the past they would spread it all over social media. Prince knows they are lacking in maturity and want to do something about this. Recently, they were involved with Family Plus,<sup>17</sup> which, according to staff, was very helpful; they would also be a good candidate for group therapy at Family Plus. Prince also spoke about the hormone therapy they are receiving from Peer SJ, and how proud they are of their progress. The Teen Resource Centre connected them with Peer SJ when they first arrived in Saint John and this support has been important.

They shared their fascination with serial killers and a desire to go into criminal investigation as they feel a strong aptitude for solving puzzles. If not, they talk about the arts as another alternative. Prince does not want to have anything to do with police; they feel the police have let them down, neglecting them when they were younger. They are a member of Black Lives Matter.

... Six months later, a number of significant changes have occurred in Prince's life and they seem to have more of a calmness about them. They have changed their name to Maren, though not yet through the formal legal process, and married their partner, who is an American citizen. Maren will need to save money to work through the immigration process. In June, Maren and their spouse moved into subsidized housing through the Teen Resource Centre, where they share a two-bedroom apartment with another couple. Money is a concern. Maren's spouse is not working and the other couple is struggling to access government assistance.

After working over a year part-time at the grocery store, they left that job in July and recently got hired to work evenings in a retail store. They credit being hired so quickly to having shown up early for the interview, a contrast to the previous interviewee, who was late. WorkLinks staff assisted them in readying their resume and encouraged their application.

Maren remains positive about their experience with the Learning Exchange and working on credits towards an AHSD. They are interested in the different classes available to them, and appreciate that staff are flexible if time is missed. By next fall they envision that they should be finished. While still fascinated with the role of a criminal investigator, they are also thinking about the health field and possibly pharmacy. A recent career-related survey through a job bank activity pointed them towards the field of psychology.

---

<sup>17</sup> Family Plus is a not-for-profit mental health care provider in Saint John, NB.



Maren is still challenged by different stresses but talks about a number of coping strategies: playing the guitar, doing art, or feeling very comfortable to stop into the Teen Resource Centre to talk to case managers or the outreach coordinator. They also benefit from financial help with food at different times.

More than once Maren has said that they never expected to live past 16 but now they have turned 19 and are “still doing good.”

**Alton** is very positive about his experience with the array of programs from GOALS, Outflow, WorkLinks, and with counselling for post-secondary education. He really enjoyed the work experience at the Social Enterprise Hub<sup>18</sup> and felt like it was a real community, a second family. It contrasts with his own family where he has been a caretaker for some of his siblings, his mother has significant mental health issues, and his father is a “loss.” His sister encouraged him to attend the Learning Exchange which he did. But when she dropped out due to postpartum depression, he dropped out too to help her cope, before coming back again.

“One good accomplishment out of the way,” says Alton. He is proud to dispel the assumption of his family and others that he couldn’t get his high school diploma. Alton started with no credits and now is completing his last credit to achieve his diploma. He said even the staff were surprised he came back, but he doesn’t want to “be on welfare and smoking pot.”

He is currently living at Youth Unbound,<sup>19</sup> and likes it there. There are only three others and he gets along with them. However, once he turns 19, which will be soon, the services to which he is eligible under the

<sup>18</sup> The Social Enterprise Hub was launched by the Saint John Community Loan Fund in November 2016 to create a space in which nonprofits can collaborate, share resources, and create new initiatives.

<sup>19</sup> Formerly Safe Harbour House, Youth Unbound provides transitional programming support for homeless youth. The ultimate goal of the house is to provide residents with a supportive environment and offer them programming to help boost self-efficacy and equip them for independent living. Currently a tendering process to deliver this service is underway by the provincial Department of Social Development.

provincial government's Youth Enhancement Services program will change. He will have to move out of Youth Unbound (although he can stay until he is 20, unless they need his place). Fortunately, numbers there are low and staff will help him find subsidized housing. His mental health counsellor also needs to change so he has already started to connect with the mental health outreach coordinator at the Teen Resource Centre.

On the one hand, Alton has big goals – his own carpentry business and to make lots of money. But on the other hand, he experiences anger, depression, and insomnia. He is easily influenced to skip classes by his girlfriend, who is in the school district's Compass Program<sup>20</sup> and not doing very well. He recognizes his anger, and how looking after others has prevented him from moving ahead. He also recognizes the progress he has made; he once spent a lot of time in bed, totally depressed, and smoking dope.

*Alton is proud to dispel the assumption of his family and others that he couldn't get his high school diploma. He started with no credits and now is completing his last credit to achieve his diploma.*

Community partners, Learning Exchange staff, and others are very positive about the progress he is making. Alton cites lots of examples of how he has been given another chance. He feels that the programs are really focused on the individual and help to lead him towards a healthier way. He recognizes that he got fired from the Social Enterprise Hub because he was continually absent, despite all the chances he was given. Alton has missed time at Outflow and feels he may have jeopardized his place. According to staff, he has stopped coming but the door is still open. He continues to attend GOALS and will be finished in June.

He tries to catch his depression before it can take over. He knows at times that he wants to be independent and not always ask for help. He notices a difference now whenever he sees his mother – that he is neutral rather than being angry with her.

He is considering an apprenticeship path in carpentry and has kept appointments to talk to staff at the Learning Exchange, at NBCC, and with the Province. The teacher at Outflow is a Red Seal carpenter and this is what he wants to be. He thinks his experience at Outflow might help him qualify for the province's apprenticeship program. Outflow could lead to summer employment and although the money is not great, there are good benefits and he knows the people. Through the Province, there could be another possible job in the private sector with higher wages and benefits.

**.....Seven months later:** Alton has successfully achieved his AHSD and he speaks about his success with a great deal of pride. He would have liked more time in the classroom but understands the challenge with Covid.

---

<sup>20</sup> An alternative learning centre for grades 9-12, through Anglophone School District South.



Through Youth Unbound Alton was able to get his driver's permit after a couple of attempts, but he will need financial aid to do the driver's education course.

Alton continues to make progress in his housing and employment situation but his mental health issues and his lack of a supportive network remain a challenge. Key to his ongoing progress are the wraparound supports provided by his case manager, Amelia; the information that Learning Exchange staff provided about apprenticeship requirements; and Josh, the outreach coordinator at the Teen Resource Centre. The importance that Alton attaches to seeing Josh was recently made evident, when a snow storm cancelled their weekly appointment. Alton was there the next day.

Alton currently is in a one-bedroom subsidized apartment. He finds it lonely with no real close friends although he talks to other residents, mostly older, in the smoking area. In a short period of time, less than six months, he moved three times; his network of "buddies" was also in precarious living situations. He moved out of Youth Unbound into a rooming house. He found it difficult because some of the other residents wouldn't clean up and were fighting. The neighbours downstairs complained, blaming all the youth. With the help of Amelia, his case manager, he was able to move into a two-bedroom in Waterloo Village with his girlfriend. But he did not feel safe in the neighbourhood and his (now ex-) girlfriend was asked to leave the subsidized housing. This has all led to the one-bedroom apartment that he now occupies, paying 25% of the rent, instead of 30%, thanks to assistance from the Teen Resource Centre.

He takes advantage of opportunities to work. Through his income assistance worker, he participated in a month-long program that focused on essential skills, followed by a job at Coast Tire. He worked a couple of weeks full-time and liked the work but his family dynamics added more stress and he reduced his hours to the point of taking a leave until after Christmas. Alton dropped out of the Outflow Carpentry Program, although he feels he was able to build skills and learn from the hands-on work and appreciated this opportunity. He is still interested in carpentry and apprenticeship. His father (who lives out West) has connections with the Carpenters' Union in Saint John. He has paid Alton's union dues and got him an early morning appointment with the Union.

**Calvin** is clearly a very willing worker, building on significant work experience in the cooking industry including five years at the Rothesay Golf and Country Club. He graduated with honours from high school in Moncton, then took the chef training program at NBCC. He was fired from his last job as a chef in January 2021.

Calvin is interested in a new career and is 9.5 weeks into the Outflow Carpentry Program. He is ambitious, speaking of plans to make a lot of money and have a number of branches across the country in the construction sector. When he began at Outflow he was homeless. He is struggling, being a single person receiving \$568 from income assistance and paying rent of \$500; he is currently two months behind. He spoke of the challenges and worries about having enough money to feed himself and his two young children, whom he sees every weekend.

Calvin had to fight for custody to see his children, aged three and seven, and seems very committed to being in their lives. His ex-partner is on income assistance and their relationship was and continues to be toxic for him. Being able to see his children is fraught with challenges, including not being able to visit without supervision. He feels there is a bias against single fathers, who receive few services and supports.

*Calvin is currently seeing the outreach coordinator at the Teen Resource Centre for stress management, particularly in regard to his role as a parent and working full-time.*

Calvin openly acknowledges that he has ADHD and anger issues. He is on medication. A mental health worker he was seeing for five months helped him get accepted in the Outflow Carpentry Training Program, even though he was starting two weeks behind the others. He is currently seeing the outreach coordinator at the Teen Resource Centre for stress management, particularly in regard to his role as a parent and working full-time. Josh (the outreach coordinator) has also approached Amelia (the case manager), to talk to Calvin about resources that could help him financially and with his children. His own family supports are very limited.

Calvin spoke of the opportunity for summer work at Outflow, which would make it possible to challenge his fourth block at NBCC; staff are making appropriate connections to help him explore this opportunity. He would like to be working full-time in a year as he feels there is lots of work. Staff at Outflow feel Calvin has great resiliency and has gained in confidence since he started in the program. However, he recently has been missing time in the program, which is disconcerting to all.

**Jerri** is 18 years old and heard about the Learning Exchange programs through his sister, who also attended. He left Saint John High in Grade Ten. He and his friends were miserable at school and felt isolated from teachers although he did connect with his gym teacher and football coach. The atmosphere at the Learning Exchange is more friendly; he feels like he is part of a team and was meant to be in this program.

He first started in the winter of 2020 but his attendance was not great. Then he started again the following September.

*Jerri finds the atmosphere at the Learning Exchange more friendly than at his high school; he feels like he is part of a team and was meant to be in this program.*

Currently, he is completing his last credit and will graduate with an AHSD. He feels he has more confidence, especially since he didn't think he was ever going to finish high school. While the program included opportunities to participate in community activities, he did not consider himself a community person. He has made progress with his personal goals. Before, he often would stay up until 2 am and then sleep all day. His case manager, Cassandra, helped him achieve the goal of getting to bed on time; it's still not perfect but there has been some progress. He

is very self-conscious about his weight and staff at the Learning Exchange are working to get him a summer membership at the "Y."

He and his friends constantly work on cars, wiring, welding, and painting. He always wanted to go on to post-secondary education and thanks to the help of staff at the Learning Exchange, this goal may become a reality. He wants to take the autobody technician course at NBCC and staff have been helping him with the application and with funding. He has been accepted into NBCC but hopes to defer his spot for a year. He broke his wrist a couple of years ago and after surgery in July, he will be in a cast for over a year. Jerrit has a stable living situation with his mother and younger brother. His plans to move out with friends are on hold because of the surgery.

Jerrit's mother is very supportive of his work, progress, and goals. He may qualify for a survivors' benefit because his father, now deceased, worked for a union. Even though he will soon be 19, if he is in school, he can receive the benefit until the age of 21. The Learning Exchange is helping to explore this opportunity. There are some unknowns as to what he might be able to do during his year of recovery. He may consider talking to WorkLinks staff about this.

**Chelsea** has many goals, especially for someone who is 17 years old. She wants to find a place to live on her own, hold down a full-time job, graduate in November 2021 with her ASHD, and go on to post-secondary education at Dalhousie University. It offers assistance for students from South Africa, her home country.

*Staff report that Chelsea is working full-time at an early learning centre / daycare and hopes to graduate in June with her AHSD.*

She feels very positive about her time at the Learning Exchange, starting in April 2021, working both online and in-person. She appreciates the friendly and social atmosphere and the acceptance of different lifestyles at the Learning Exchange. It is also helping Chelsea to upgrade her math and English and gain a biology credit so she can apply for psychology at Dalhousie.

Chelsea spent most of her life in South Africa. She and her family arrived in Saint John in April 2020. She was home-schooled by her mother, which worked well. Her mother is very supportive of Chelsea both working and going to school. Usually, Chelsea's mother provides transportation to school and work from their home in a rural area outside of Saint John. She says little about her father and brother except to emphasize that she has minimal contact with both of them.

Chelsea says that she has been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and knows she suffers from depression and anxiety. She feels the mental health system failed her because it didn't take her issues seriously. Although she saw a psychiatrist, there was no follow-up. She was connected to a social worker whom she didn't find helpful. Currently, she is seeing a therapist, someone known to a friend of her mother's. She feels that this, together with the right medication, is helping her. She is on a waiting list to see a psychiatrist. She recognizes that keeping busy and productive is key and feels she has more control over her emotions. She is cautious about oversharing her story and is learning more about herself. Until recently she



was volunteering at Outflow's community centre, helping with packaging food and serving. Despite these activities she finds it very hard to make friends.

WorkLinks helped Chelsea complete her resume and coached her on approaching employers. She secured a full-time job at a local pub as a line cook, starting May 24<sup>th</sup>. Her goal is to earn enough money to cover the damage deposit for an apartment and the first month's rent. But she readily admits that the work is hard; as the only young person on the job, she feels isolated. She would prefer a different kind of job, but this is the first job that she can add to her resume. She and members of her family recently received permanent residency status, which is encouraging her to plan her next steps.

As an update, staff report that Chelsea is working full-time at an early learning centre/daycare and hopes to graduate in June with her AHSD.

**Ayaan** is a confident teen who has adjusted well since coming to Canada three years ago, originally from Somalia. She is happy and interested in life and doing well in school. She received tangible and moral support from the Teen Resource Centre and Learning Exchange to secure housing, government identifications, and a part-time job and now is considered in need of only "light case management." She is receiving assistance from Pathways to Education, particularly in specific subjects such as history.

*Ayaan received tangible and moral support from the Teen Resource Centre and Learning Exchange to secure housing, government identifications, and a part-time job and now is considered in need of only "light case management."*

She first came to Saint John in 2017 with her two brothers and lived with her father and stepmother and was able to access gift cards and bus passes. She learned English at the Teen Resource Centre, speaking with other youth and staff, an experience that she found comfortable. She has an aptitude for languages. She knows Arabic, Somali, Swahili, and English and is now learning French.

In December 2019 her case manager was able to secure subsidized housing for Ayaan and her two older brothers, which has worked out well. Both brothers are working, one as a security guard and the other at Britt's Pub and Eatery. Ayaan received help from WorkLinks to prepare for work and since May has been working 14 hours a week at Britt's as well, though not at the same location as her brother. In September she added another part-time job, working five or six hours a week at A&W. She spoke briefly about Youth Enhancement Services funding, which she has not been able to access since January because her brothers make too much money to qualify.

She would like to go into nursing, ideally into medicine, but feels this would be too expensive. She plans to go to Alberta to help her sister with her young children and will look into nursing while she is there.

## What the Case Studies Demonstrate

These cases demonstrate the variety of challenging situations that young people can face, and how uneven and complex are the pathways towards their goals. There are steps forward and steps backward, a reality in which supports that are both comprehensive and responsive can be highly advantageous to a young person. The youth interviewed for these cases were very positive about their experience at UYES! and took great pride in the successes they achieved.

These cases demonstrate several things about the value of UYES! and what it takes to help young people make progress in their lives:

- ❑ With adequate and responsive support, young people who face challenges can make progress on their education and employment goals.
- ❑ Setbacks are common, and having the necessary supports ready and waiting when these setbacks occur can help stabilize youth.
- ❑ Essential to their candidacy for future employment opportunities are an AHSD and, in many cases, post-secondary education.
- ❑ Wraparound supports are an essential component of the education and employment programs.
- ❑ To help them address personal and other challenges, youth are willing to engage with coaching, case management, and outreach supports.
- ❑ Youth who experience challenges in terms of mental health, safe and affordable housing, and reliable family support demonstrate significant trust and comfort with the UYES! programs and supports (“someone really cares about me”).
- ❑ An approach to program delivery that emphasizes coaching and encouragement is key to youth retention and success. This is true even when the support required is (or seems) minimal.
- ❑ The journey to sustainable employment takes time.

