

# Alleviating Homelessness: Quasi-Experimental Study

INTERIM REPORT

April 30, 2021

**SRDC**  **SRSA**

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION CORPORATION  
SOCIÉTÉ DE RECHERCHE SOCIALE APPLIQUÉE



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This project is funded by the Government of Canada's  
Work Integration Social Enterprises Initiative

## INTRODUCTION

The Alleviating Homelessness: WISE Research is the first study of its kind in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Its main purpose is to provide longitudinal data to identify the effectiveness of WISEs and compare them with other interventions for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The five-year research project is utilizing a quasi-experimental design to identify the impact of WISEs on outcomes such as employment and housing stabilization, as well as the returns for government investment in these types of WISEs. The project has partnered with five WISEs in the GTA to compare employment and training models with the objective of identifying effective practices to support job seekers who currently are, or are at risk of, homelessness.

Funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the project is being led by the Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet) in partnership with Allan Day of the Social Enterprise Toronto (SET) and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), which is responsible for designing and conducting the evaluation of this project.

### **What is a social enterprise?**

Social enterprises are organizations that produce goods and services for the market economy and that manage their operations and redirect their surpluses to achieve social and environmental goals. Social enterprise activity gives public benefit organizations an alternate source of funds to better fulfill their mandates (SEOntario).

**What is a WISE?** A work integration social enterprise or WISE is regarded as a subset of social enterprises that have a social mission to directly support vulnerable community members who are facing exclusion from the labour market (ESDC). WISEs will involve these individuals in producing and selling goods or services, most often in a paid capacity with the objective of supporting their integration into the work environment and society. WISEs generally have one of two long-term goals: to provide individuals with secure, stable employment within the organization or to support them in being employed in the labour market.

The project team has partnered with WISEs in the GTA who train and/or employ individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The WISEs have been involved with recruiting participants for the research study among new or current employees. The WISEs have provided the participants with training and/or paid employment, as well as connections to other supports or referrals to other services during or after their intervention. The WISE participants have been asked to complete an initial survey as well as follow-ups for three years to track the impact that their participation had on a key set of outcomes measuring their employment and housing situation, as well as their overall well-being. Participants are being benchmarked against those of a comparison group of clients with a similar profile who have been recruited from partner community organizations.

## WISE PARTNER DESCRIPTIONS

The project has partnered with five organizations operating social enterprises in the Greater Toronto Area.



Building Up is a social enterprise established in Toronto in 2014 which runs a pre-apprenticeship trades training program for individuals with barriers to employment. Building Up has three

main areas of work which are (1) water efficiency retrofits in apartment buildings, specifically toilets, showerheads and faucet aerators, (2) general contracting including renovations of bathrooms, kitchens and homes, and (3) general labour. The water efficiency retrofits prevent overconsumption and therefore supports a healthier environment. The enterprise is located at 116 Industry Street, York and the training center is at 31 Jutland Rd, Etobicoke.



Hawthorne Food & Drink was a social enterprise of Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC), a non-profit organization that is based on a sectoral workforce development approach. The enterprise was located at 60 Richmond Street East in

Toronto. The restaurant served food using local, seasonal and sustainable ingredients, and the menus took inspiration from Ontario farms and Toronto neighbourhoods. In terms of the training, the enterprise provided hands-on training to prepare individuals with social barriers to work in entry level hospitality sector positions, primarily within restaurants and hotels. The training was based off a model of a workplace development training center for the hospitality industry.



### LINENS & DISPOSAL SERVICES

Gateway Linens and Disposal Services (“Gateway Linens”) is a fee-for-service industrial laundry facility affiliated with the organization The Salvation Army, providing training and employment. The enterprise is located at 312 Broadview Avenue in Toronto. The program consists primarily of laundry services, including picking up linens from organizations, sorting and laundering, then packaging and delivering them back to customer locations. A secondary aspect of the enterprise is a garbage-disposals service for select customers. The program began in 2007, expanded in 2010 and has demonstrated consistent, planned growth over subsequent years. It is focused on supporting participants to attain transferable skills that can be used to secure long-term employment and independent living, free from reliance on government assistance (social benefits). While senior management within The Salvation Army typically refer to Gateway Linens as an employment retraining program, Gateway Linens management views itself as a social enterprise.



Services and Housing In the Province (SHIP) is an organization with a mission to increase quality of life through health services and housing supports that promote mental health, physical health, and wellness. SHIP is located at 969 Derry Road East in Mississauga, which is in the Greater Toronto Area, west of Toronto. SHIP operates social enterprises in Peel and Dufferin providing clients with employment opportunities that are flexible and supportive. This includes the Social Coffee Bean (formerly known as Destination Café) and DC Cleaning as well as two other social enterprises.

With Social Coffee Bean positions fulfilled by individuals with certain skill sets, there were intentional efforts to develop another enterprise, which was informed by the understanding that some individuals with social barriers work better independently without engaging with others. Under the umbrella of the Social Coffee Bean, another enterprise was developed called DC Cleaning. The Social Coffee Bean operates in Port Credit (Mississauga) with DC Cleaning operating across the Region of Peel and West Toronto. Additional enterprises are operated within Peel Youth Village – Acorn Café & Catering and The Coffee Hub in Orangeville.

## LOFT Kitchen

The LOFT social enterprise provides café and catering services to local clientele and it is an enterprise within Christie Ossington Community Centre (CONC). When the enterprise opened in 2014, it was operating at 850 Bloor West and as of 2019 it moved to the George Chuvalo Community Centre which is operated by CONC. This community space has both catering and the café and the broader community hub offers youth and family community programs, including drop-ins. Overall, the enterprise maintains operations as result of grant funding and youth wage supports. Within the last year and a half, they have been able to increase their revenue from the café and catering to cover an increasing portion of operational costs.

## EVALUATION APPROACH

The SRDC research team is utilizing a participatory approach to guide the evaluation design and activities to involve the project’s partners and other stakeholders in the design, data collection, analysis, and reporting stages to ensure quality and usefulness in both the process and outcomes of the evaluation. A participatory evaluation approach is enabling the research team to be reflexive and action-oriented, as it provides opportunity to make improvements to the evaluation throughout the process.

The project’s participatory approach to evaluation is also aiming to support the evaluation capacity among the WISE partners. While the research data collection tools are serving to assess the impact

of the WISE interventions on participant outcomes, it was anticipated that a collaborative development process with the WISE partners will contribute to ongoing WISE capacity to measure their social impact. Specifically, participation in the research will provide partner WISEs with a comprehensive framework for measuring outcomes which are important for their employees (or clients), tools to measure these outcomes going forward, and a set of strategies to follow up with employees or program trainees over the long term.

Another means for engaging project stakeholders in the evaluation process is through the project's Advisory Reference Group. One of the key purposes of this group is to serve as a structure for engaging key internal and external stakeholders throughout the design, implementation and evaluation stages of the project. The reference group includes representatives of participating WISEs, partner organizations (CCEDNet, SET, TEF, SRDC) as well as social enterprise, homelessness and policy experts. The group has been meeting regularly throughout the project to provide input, advice and feedback. The Advisory Reference Group is also providing input on the relevance and applicability of the research project to the broader WISE and/or homelessness community, in Toronto, provincially and/or nationally.

## Key research questions

The research study has been designed to test a primary hypothesis that investments made by WISEs can produce a substantial positive return on investment for government, and that the outcomes and experiences of WISE participants can meaningfully vary depending on their circumstances and specific program components. To test this hypothesis, the evaluation framework was designed to answer five key questions:

1. To what extent are WISEs that work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness promoting their social and labour market integration?
2. How do the impacts for these people compare with impacts for those who have other interventions or no interventions?
3. How do the outcomes and experiences of the different kinds of structured social enterprise on-the-job-training compare under various circumstances (social enterprise industry type, initial level of housing instability, across vulnerabilities – mental health issues, youth, Indigenous people or recent immigrants)?
4. What features of participating WISEs are particularly effective in promoting the social and labour market integration of these populations?
5. What is the return on investment for government financial support of this set of WISEs?

The questions have guided the development of the evaluation design as well as the data collection instruments used to capture outcomes at both the participant and organizational levels.

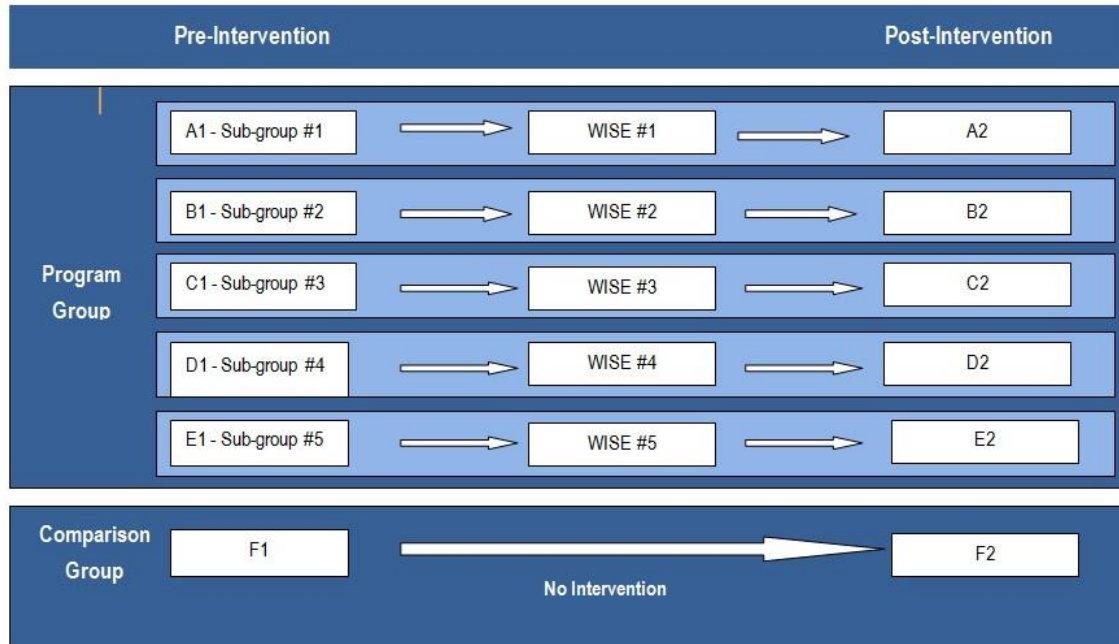
## Research Design

### Quasi-experimental design

The project is utilizing a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design to estimate changes in participant outcomes that result from participation in a WISE intervention involving training and/or employment. To confidently estimate the impact of participation in a WISE requires a comparison of outcomes between two groups: a group that receives the intervention – the program group; and a highly similar group that does not – the comparison group. Without the option of conducting an experimental evaluation, which by design mitigates any differences between both groups, a quasi-experimental approach that compares participant outcomes to those of a group of individuals who share a similar profile is the next best option.

Assessing participants before and after the intervention for up to three years is enabling the research team to measure changes to social and economic outcomes over a longer period of time. This longer time frame will give a better understanding of the degree and nature of integration into the labour market of program participants when compared to the alternative pathways taken by comparison group members over the same period of time. Figure 1 below shows the before and after training quasi-experimental design. Subsequent longitudinal follow-ups are explored in the Methods section below.

**Figure 1 The Project's Pre-Post Quasi-Experimental Design**



While this approach is expected to rigorously assess the impacts of WISE participation on individual outcomes for participants employed and/or trained by the project’s WISE partners, it should be noted that the given the project’s limited scope, caution needs to be taken when extending these findings to other jurisdictions and contexts. A rigorous understanding of WISE effectiveness in different jurisdictions, as well as urban, suburban, and rural contexts would require a considerably broader research study. As a result, a definitive understanding of the degree to which the project’s results can be extended to other parts of the province or country is beyond the scope of this study.

It is also important to note that the comparison group as designed cannot be considered as a true counterfactual that precisely reflects what would have happened if WISE participants had not engaged in employment or training with their respective organizations. Consequently, the evaluation team will aim to use statistical techniques and other contextual information to account for the limitations in this approach where a true counterfactual was not available to assess WISE participant impacts. However, it is expected that this research will considerably advance the general understanding of how different WISE models can support individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in urban areas of Canada. In addition, the evaluation framework and capacity-building evaluation tools established for the purposes of this study will provide a strong basis for extending research to WISE programs across the country, and contribute to the development of a national understanding of WISE effectiveness.



## COMPARISON GROUP PARTNERS

The original research design anticipated that the project team would recruit a comparison group of up to 300 income assistance clients through partner community organizations, including the Ontario Ministry of Community & Social Services, and Toronto Employment & Social Services. Preliminary discussion with both provincial and municipal officials indicated that the team designing the project would be in a position to secure longitudinal data on Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients or other clients of government income support programs who face similar circumstances to the program group in terms of their income and housing situation and would otherwise benefit from participation in a WISE. The expectation was that this longitudinal client data would enable SRDC researchers to construct a sizeable comparison group against which WISE participant outcomes could be compared.

Due to early challenges secure such data-sharing agreements with both the provincial and municipal governments after project launch, the team had to pursue alternative approaches to assembling a comparison group through direct recruitment of clients of community organizations and/or government agencies that serve job seekers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a similar profile to project participants. The project team is grateful to three community partners in the Greater Toronto Area for allowing us to engage clients or participants in their programs to participate in the study: Working for Change, Parkdale Activity - Recreation Centre (PARC), Peel Youth Village, as well as Services and Housing in the Province (SHIP). Each of the partners operates one or more social enterprises, and offers drop-in space, support or programming to individuals with similar characteristics.

### Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre

The Parkdale Activity-Recreation began as a place to go for adults living in rooming houses & boarding homes in the Parkdale area after the local mental health centres began to de-institutionalize psychiatric patients in the late 1970's.

Since 1977, when it first opened its doors at 1499 Queen Street West, PARC has served as a community hub. It is accessible to anyone who might be in need of a cup of coffee, a chat, or a warm bite to eat. It is embedded in the community of Parkdale, but its work stretches outwards across the city to address the greater systemic issues of poverty, mental health, housing, and food security. Knowing that no one agency can tackle these issues alone, PARC works with dozens of community partner agencies and businesses to ensure our efforts reverberate as widely as possible.

PARC uses a recovery-orientated approach, one that includes and celebrates, psychiatric consumer/survivor participation in all levels of the organization. Members (people with lived experience) comprise half of PARC's Board of Directors. Members are represented in its Drop-in

and Outreach teams, and a high percentage of PARC staff identify as having lived experience with mental health and addiction issues.

As a multi-service organization, PARC operates a drop-in centre that serves over 1100 members annually and peer outreach, housing and employment support services. Comparison group survey respondents were drawn from community members accessing the drop-in centre and services.

## Services and Housing in the Province

Services and Housing In the Province (SHIP) is an organization with a mission to increase quality of life through health services and housing supports that promote mental health, physical health, and wellness. Comparison group survey respondents were drawn from two services operated by SHIP.

Peel Youth Village provides stable transitional housing and support services for you for up to a year less a day. Programming is designed to build individual strength and resiliency. An emphasis is placed on health and fitness. Peel Youth Village includes a gym and fitness centre. Case management is provided. The combination of transitional housing and supports is aimed to provide you with tools and resources to succeed.

Lakeshore Links is a drop-in group located in close proximity to the Social Coffee Bean open to individuals that access SHIP programming and the surrounding community of Port Credit. Group members work collectively in a safe space to alleviate the pressure caused by popular stigmas surrounding mental health and to navigate the mental health system.

## Working for Change

Working for Change's mission is to provide training and employment opportunities to people who have been marginalized by mental health/ addictions challenges, poverty, homelessness, violence and refugee/newcomer issues; to speak out against marginalization; to work to change policies that adversely affect our communities.

It envisions a society where everyone has access to meaningful employment, adequate housing, a society that no longer stigmatizes people with mental health/addictions issues, a society where no one is hungry, and where social enterprises are a thriving and vibrant sector of the Canadian economy.

To enact its mission, Working for Change operates 5 social enterprises, provides job specific pre-employment training, peer support and through their Voices and Women's Speak Out programs support politically and socially marginalized individuals to bring their perspectives to community groups, policy and decision makers. Its approach is built upon the lived experience and knowledge

of people disadvantaged by mental health/addictions challenges, poverty, homelessness, violence and refugee/newcomer issues.

Comparison group survey respondents were drawn from Working for Change's pre-employment programming. Pre-employment group members are individuals who are marginalized and have been out of the workplace for an extended period of time.

## Community Researcher Team

As this study involves individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the project team identified early on that there would be a strong likelihood that some participants would not remain engaged in the study for the full three years, particularly with large gaps in engagement between surveys or other engagement activities. This attrition was expected to be caused by various factors including prospective participants' housing instability, employment status or change in social and/or health supports over the study years.

To help mitigate attrition, the team developed a participant engagement strategy in collaboration with participating WISEs to maximize the likelihood that participants stay engaged with the WISEs even after completing their intervention. This strategy is focused primarily on the role of a Community Researcher Team that would work with the WISEs to follow-up with participants and remain in contact with them over time. This team is comprised of individuals who have lived experience and enterprise experience that can better position them to engage with participants. The Community Researcher Team was originally created by the United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) in 2009 to support the Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF) in a multi-year participatory evaluation process by gathering longitudinal data. TEF is an innovative partnership collaboration of UWGT and three levels of government and funds employment social enterprises.

TEF's peer-based evaluation approach is dependent on its Community Researchers who are all individuals who have worked with social enterprises and have been referred to TEF by their enterprise managers. In addition to being trained in survey taking method, the Community Researchers supporting this project bring a range of enterprise experiences. One currently works as an interpreter. Another has worked in enterprise administration in the landscaping and women's fashion sectors. A third has worked in the food sector taking on both administrative and food preparation.

Community Researchers typically have met with survey participants at enterprises, workplaces, community centres and or coffee shops, as designated by the participant. This approach has been successful in reaching out to survey participants as peers and increases their comfort in understanding and answering survey questions. In some cases, the team has been successful in connecting with individuals with whom even the WISE partners have lost contact over time.

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

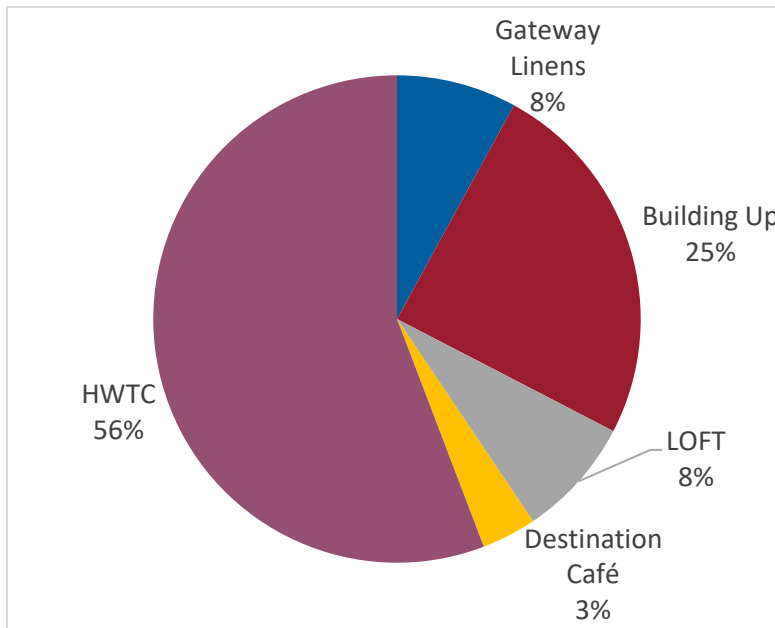
As explained above, this project involves two groups of participants: a program group who are individuals who participate in employment and/or training with partner WISEs, and a comparison group of similar individuals who are clients of community-based programs and were not engaged in a WISE intervention at the time of recruitment to the study.

The research team aimed to enrol 75-100 individuals who were recruited by the project's WISE partners to participate in their employment and/or training programs over a one-year period (January to December 2018). Each of these individuals were invited to be part of the research study, signed an informed consent to share their data with the research team, and completed an intake (baseline) survey. Participants were provided an honorarium for completing the intake survey and were informed that further compensation would be provided each time they participated in a research activity.

While the project team worked with four of the WISE partners to recruit participants directly, the Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC) provided a unique opportunity to build off their ongoing evaluation process. Consultations with the HWTC team revealed that their participant outcomes evaluation overlapped significantly with those of the research project, and that they already tracked their training participant outcomes for one year. To avoid duplication, HWTC agreed to a data sharing arrangement with the project's research team whereby they would share data on participants who began the HWTC training over the project's recruitment period. At the conclusion of the HWTC follow-up period, the participants would be invited to join the research study to complete the year two and year three follow-up surveys.

Through these two approaches, the project team was able to recruit 138 participants to be part of the WISE participant group. The WISE participant group was recruited as shown in Figure 2.

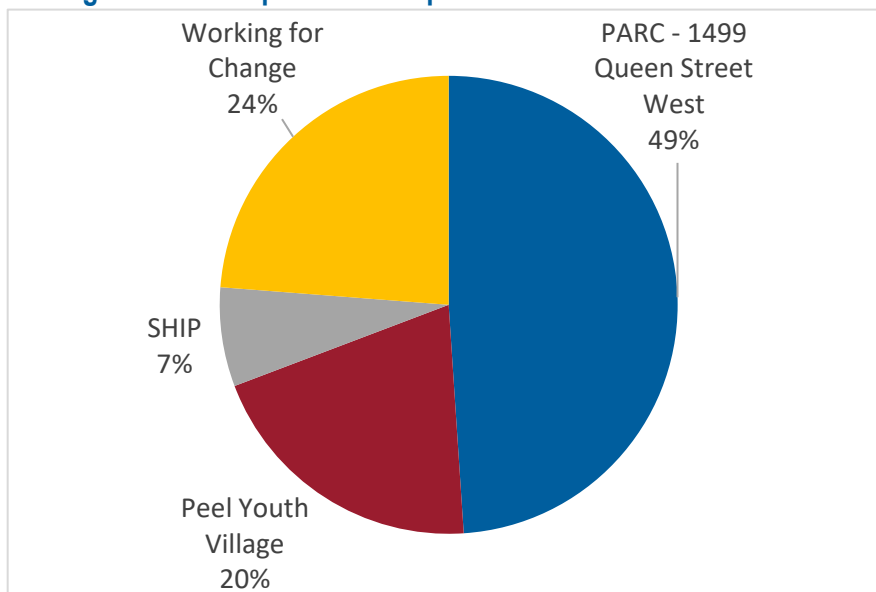
**Figure 2 WISE Participant Recruitment Sources**



n=138

In 2018 and 2019, Allan Day of SET and the Community Research team were able to engage 144 clients of the three comparison group referral organizations to be part of the research study. The comparison group consists of clients of four main referral programs as illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3 Comparison Group Recruitment Sources**



n=144

Similar to the program group, comparison group members completed an informed consent and intake study at the time of recruitment and agreed to complete three annual follow-up surveys. They were provided an honorarium for completing the intake survey and were informed that they would be provided compensation for all research activities in which they participated over the course of the project.

Table 1 provides a summary set of characteristics for the two research groups using the combination of data gathered through project intake surveys as well as data shared by HWTC on their participants. The table provides a preliminary set of variables to illustrate the demographic profile and current employment, housing and other personal circumstances of participants. It also provides a statistical test of differences between the two groups across key baseline characteristics. Asterisks are used to denote any statistical significance of the differences between the two groups at the level of 10 per cent (denoted by \*), 5 per cent (\*\*), and 1 per cent (\*\*\*) .

The table shows that while there are key differences between the two groups, they share a similar profile overall. Members of both groups were more likely to be men (58 per cent of comparison group members vs. 62.8 of WISE group members), born in Canada (70.1 per cent vs. 62.3 per cent), and have Indigenous identity (7.8 per cent vs. 10.0 per cent). Both groups were nearly as likely to report that they were never married (75.7 per cent vs. 81.9 per cent), although the comparison group were significantly more likely to report that they were divorced, while the WISE group was significantly more likely to report being married at intake.

As this project is focused on understanding the circumstances, experiences and employment journeys of people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, a key characteristic to note is participants' current housing situation. Given the respective referral sources between the groups, it is not surprising to observe some differences between the two groups in this area. While over half of both groups reported having permanent housing at intake, the WISE group was less likely to describe their housing situation in this manner, and nearly one-fifth (19.5 per cent) of the group indicated their housing situation did not fall under any of the housing categories provided.

Although comparison group members were significantly more likely than WISE group members to report having permanent housing, they were also significantly more likely to report living in transitional housing or in another institution, such as a mental health centre or halfway housing facility. These differences are also reflected in the extent to which both groups are living independently or in a supported situation, with roughly twice the proportion of comparison group members indicating that they were living independently at intake when compared to WISE group members (74.3 per cent vs. 37.7 per cent). A small but similar proportion of both groups were living in a situation where they were supporting others, such as a spouse or children.

Other key differences between the two groups are their age profiles and educational backgrounds. The comparison group tended to be older, with 43.8 per cent being 50 or older at intake compared

to only 10.1 per cent of WISE group members. This led to an average difference of over eight years between the two groups.

While more than half of both groups reported having at least a high school diploma, the WISE group had achieved higher levels of education, with over three-quarters (77.1 per cent) having a high school diploma, compared to 58.0 per cent of the comparison group.

Given the project's focus on longer-term employment outcomes as a result of the WISE interventions, it is important to note that both groups had similar employment statuses at intake, with nearly 80 per cent of both groups (78.5 per cent vs. 79.0 per cent) of both groups reporting that they were not working when completing the intake survey.

**Table 1 Summary Characteristics of Participants at Intake**

	Comparison Group (N=144)	WISE Group (N=138)	Difference	Standard error
<b>Gender (%)</b>				
Female	39.2	36.5	-2.7	(5.8)
Male	58.0	62.8	4.7	(5.9)
Non-Binary (incl. 2 spirit and gender fluid identities)	2.8	0.7	-2.1	(1.6)
<b>Average Age</b>	43.5	35.2	-8.3 ***	(1.6)
<b>Median Age</b>	47.0	33.5	-13.5 ***	(0.0)
<b>Age (%)</b>				
30 or younger	26.4	43.5	17.1 ***	(5.6)
31 to 40	11.8	27.5	15.7 ***	(4.6)
41 to 50	18.1	18.8	0.8	(4.6)
50 and older	43.8	10.1	-33.6 ***	(4.9)
<b>Immigration Category (%)</b>				
Not born in Canada	29.9	37.7	7.8	(5.6)
Born in Canada	70.1	62.3	-7.8	(5.6)
<b>Indigenous Identification (%)</b>				
Non-Indigenous	92.2	90.0	-2.2	(4.1)
Indigenous (First Nations)	7.8	10.0	2.2	(4.1)
<b>Have a High School diploma (%)</b>				
No	42.0	22.9	-19.1 ***	(5.6)
Yes	58.0	77.1	19.1 ***	(5.6)
<b>Household Structure (%)</b>				
Marital Status				
Never married	75.7	81.9	6.2	(5.0)
Married	3.5	13.4	9.9 ***	(3.3)
Divorced, separated, or widowed	20.8	4.7	-16.1 ***	(4.0)
Support (%)				
Self-supporting (e.g., living alone, living with roommates)	74.3	37.7	-36.6 ***	(6.9)
Supported (e.g., living with parents, in-laws, supported housing)	11.8	47.5	35.7 ***	(5.9)
Supporting others (e.g., spouse, children, extended family)	13.9	14.8	0.9	(5.3)



<b>Housing Situation (%)</b>					
I have permanent housing (incl. renting, or low-income housing)	69.4	57.1	-12.3	**	(5.8)
I am couch surfing or staying with friends or family	5.6	9.8	4.2		(3.2)
I am staying in transitional housing offered by the City or other community agency	16.7	6.8	-9.9	**	(3.9)
I am staying at another institution, such as a mental health centre or a halfway housing facility	2.1	0.0	-2.1	*	(1.2)
I am homeless or staying in a shelter	6.3	6.8	0.5		(3.0)
Other (not specified)	0.0	19.5	19.5	***	(3.3)
<b>Employment Status at Baseline (%)</b>					
Not working	78.5	79.0	0.5		(4.9)
Working	21.5	21.0	-0.5		(4.9)

Source: SRDC intake surveys and data shared by HWTC. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

Table 2 provides an additional set of information on WISE and comparison group members that was captured exclusively through the project intake survey. As a result, these figures do not reflect the situation or outlook of HWTC participants who were not asked to complete the survey.

The table shows that while there were similarities in the employment status of both groups at intake, as noted above, the WISE group was significantly more likely to be looking for work, with 79.7 per cent of WISE group members reporting that they were looking for long-term employment, compared to less than half (43.6 per cent) of comparison group members. When asked about their financial situation, WISE group members were significantly more likely to indicate they would like to generate more income and that they are looking for a better job. Both groups self-reported similar levels of financial stress, with both groups scoring on average close to seven on the ten-point financial stress scale.

These differences in participants' intentions to improve their employment and income is not surprising given how both groups were engaged in the study, yet it speaks to the complications of conducting an impact analysis when comparing the outcomes of two groups that may have different levels of motivation to find work, or be at different points in their employment journeys when recruited for the research study. While these differences may converge over time, the longer-term outcomes analysis will need to take this large observable difference into account, as it may reflect other unobservable differences in characteristics or motivation between the two groups.

**Table 2 Intake Characteristics of WISE Participants (Excluding Hawthorne) and Comparison Group**

	Comparison Group (N=144)	WISE Group (N=61)	Difference	Standard error
<b>Looking for long term work (%)</b>				
No	43.6	10.2	-33.4 ***	(7.2)
Yes	43.6	79.7	36.1 ***	(7.6)
Not sure	12.9	10.2	-2.7	(5.3)
<b>Financial Situation (%) (participants were asked to select all that apply, thus percentages add to &gt; 100%)</b>				
I would like to generate more income but I'm managing	26.4	52.5	26.1 ***	(7.0)
I'm trying to secure a better job (this could include a more stable job, or getting more hours at work)	19.4	57.4	37.9 ***	(6.6)
I do not have enough income but I'm not actively trying to generate more	12.5	21.3	8.8	(5.5)
My financial situation is affecting my well-being	35.4	24.6	-10.8	(7.1)
I'm comfortable or optimistic about my future	16.7	9.8	-6.8	(5.4)
None of these statements apply to me	18.8	4.9	-13.8 **	(5.3)
<b>Financial Stress (Scale 1-10, 1 no stress at all to 10 extreme stress)</b>	6.9	6.6	-0.3	(0.4)
<b>Feeling about current housing situation (%)</b>				
Always worried	27.8	33.3	5.6	(7.0)
Sometimes worried	36.1	46.7	10.6	(7.5)
Not worried	36.1	20.0	-16.1 **	(7.1)
<b>Health (Scale 1-10, 1 Poor to 10 Excellent)</b>	6.3	7.5	1.2 ***	(0.3)
<b>Life Satisfaction (Scale 1-10, 1 Very Dissatisfied to 10 Very Satisfied)</b>	5.9	5.7	-0.2	(0.4)

Source: SRDC intake surveys. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

The table also provides further insights into how both groups were feeling about their current housing situation, with the comparison group being somewhat more likely to report that they were not worried about their housing at intake (36.1 per cent vs. 20.0 per cent of the WISE group). Participants were also asked a series of questions about their health and personal well-being. The table illustrates on average, WISE group members were more likely to self-report being in better health, on average scoring themselves 7.5 on the ten-point health scale, compared to an average score of 6.3 among comparison group members. When asked about their overall life satisfaction, both groups self-rated themselves on average at just under six on a ten-point scale, with no statistical differences between the two groups.

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PROJECT PARTNERS

## CURRENT AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on both the project's WISE partners and study participants. The project partnership has continued to meet on a quarterly basis to share how their respective organizations have been faring during the pandemic, as well as discuss any necessary adjustment to the research approaches and activities.

This section provides in-depth profiles for each of the WISE partners that document how each enterprise has been affected by the pandemic, as well as provide further information on their current operations and approaches to support people who participate in their training and/or employment, their current capacity and approaches to follow-up with participants, as well as their future prospects, as can be determined in the midst of the pandemic.

## BUILDING UP

Since the first wave of COVID-19 in March 2020, the enterprise has had to put safety procedures in place, change their recruitment and training, and lay off participants. With the first wave of COVID-19, participants were all laid off at once however towards the end of 2020, they were able to transition to laying participants off in smaller groups. The benefit of this was that it enabled participants to be supported by case managers in a more targeted manner, so that time could be allotted to planning for next steps.

### Intake

Participants of the enterprise includes those who are on social assistance, living in social housing and newcomers/immigrants whose main barrier to employment can include a lack of Canadian experience. Initially, the enterprise was conducting community outreach to attract potential participants however now that they have a stronger reputation, there is a huge demand in training with the enterprise. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the information workshops and the interview process have moved online.

### Training

The enterprise partnered with BUILD Inc. in Winnipeg to design the trades-based curriculum. The training is typically 16 weeks and consists of a mix of classroom essential skills training, hands-on training and career-related workshops which provides participants the technical skills they will need to pursue a career in the trades. They are also provided with more general training including life skills training, to support their overall well-being. Onsite training initially took place at their

main site, which is the Learning Enrichment Foundation, however they have now secured a separate training site.

Due to COVID-19, within a few days of the first wave, they were successfully able to shift the entire training online. Over time, they moved to partial in-person and partial online training but given a current rise in cases, they will likely increase online training. Several work-site trainings have shut down, which has an added benefit of participants not feeling pressured to work or being penalized for saying no to a shift. With online training, participants have been missing out on receiving hands-on experience. In lieu of this, many have been able to receive their hands-on experience once they are on the job, after completion of the online training.

## Participant Supports

Participants were initially receiving informal case management however over the years, the enterprise has been able to hire three case managers to support them with their social needs. The enterprise also has a part-time counsellor available to participants, whose focus is to support them with health and wellness.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Building Up has been able to support participants with financial assistance such as CERB and EI. When the pandemic began, they started a GoFundMe website to raise funds for participants who became laid off, and this was helpful in terms of supporting them to pay for their day-to-day living expenses. Now, they are supporting participants in transitioning from hourly wage earners to salaried staff so they can have a stable, predictable income. They have also been provided with PC gift cards, and have received financial support to pay for utilities, phone bills, and first and last month's rent.

## Evaluation

Initially, spreadsheet templates were used to track participants' data however they have switched to using a Sales Force database, as this helps to organize data. In the last few years, the enterprise has hired an HR Administrator and HR Manager who have provided support with tracking participant outcomes. The program has now implemented report cards for participants, where case managers track their progress at the beginning, middle and end of their training. Participants also complete a self-assessment at mid-term and at the end of their training.

## Employment

As a result of networking and employer partnerships such as with Toronto Community Housing, Building Up supports participants to secure apprenticeships. Participants often work under the supervision of accredited journeymen to gain employment experience. The enterprise recently hired a business development manager to support trainees in becoming connected to temporary labour opportunities at different companies. This led to trainees being placed in more positions to learn new skills, as well as accessing opportunities for more longer-term employment.

## Former Participants & Follow-Up

Often time, employment in the trades is precarious as participants tend to be employed for the short-term due to seasonal work and contractual work. Therefore, many reconnect with the enterprise, even years after completing their training, with the intent to network for further employment opportunities. For former participants, Building Up now has a pilot alumni program which provides wraparound social services and supports individuals with attaining Journey Men status, which certifies them to work in the trades industry.

## Outcomes and Well-Being

Overall, success has been defined as participants being employed in the long term or pursuing further education, especially given the hardships that they've experienced in their lives. This is especially a success when the barriers they've faced to employment in the past include not having Canadian experience and not having the expected educational qualifications.

Now with COVID-19, participants are experiencing greater mental health challenges; many had stressors prior to COVID-19 which are now being exacerbated, including trauma, incarceration and the experience of being newcomers to Canada. Many are also experiencing food insecurities and precarious housing, including landlords who are threatening to evict tenants if they have been late to pay their rent. Many participants of the program tend to be the bread winners of their families and therefore being laid off has had an impact on their whole families.

## Future

Overall, the enterprise has grown quickly in a short period of time. In the first few years, they placed a lot of emphasis in becoming more efficient to maximize existing resources. Now, that they've been able to increase their internal resources through increased funding, their biggest challenges have shifted to becoming flexible and adaptive to different challenges, especially COVID-19. Their resilience has become their greatest success and strengthened their overall impact as a social enterprise.

A positive has been that in the midst of the pandemic, participants are expressing their appreciation for receiving training at Building Up as it's supporting their overall well-being, given the strong sense of community they feel. One of the current challenges is that there's so many individuals interested in becoming Building Up participants, however due to social distancing protocols, they are only able to have a handful of participants join. In the last cohort, there was 100 individuals interested however only six participants could be selected. In the post-pandemic future, Building Up hopes to be able to accommodate 50 individuals into one cohort.

## HAWTHORNE FOOD AND DRINK

The Hospitality Workers Training Centre (HWTC) operated Hawthorne Food & Drink from December 2012 to March 2020. At the time the enterprise opened, there was novelty and higher public interest than in later years. However, due to slim margins over time given the costs of maintain a food enterprise, it was not sustainable to continue operations. Although many restaurants shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this closure was already planned, and therefore independent of the shut down due to the pandemic.

In March 2020 upon the decision to close, consideration was given as to how HWTC's kitchen could be utilized as a community asset to support individuals during the pandemic. As a result of discussions with Second Harvest and United Way, the kitchen is being used to produce emergency meals. Four prior HWTC trainees were hired to produce meals which are being distributed to front-line community agencies that supporting homeless and vulnerable individuals, e.g., soup kitchens, community meal programs. These former participants are being paid through training from the City of Toronto as well as foundational funding.

Upon industry recovery and the return demand for entry level cooks, servers and dishwashers, HWTC will resume our training programs, but not in a retail enterprise.

### Intake

The target program participants were job seekers experiencing barriers to employment including youth and individuals in receipt of Ontario Disability Supports and Ontario Works. Referrals for the enterprise were coming in from outreach and engagement activities including a weekly information session, OW, ODSP care worker referrals and word-of-mouth referrals. Prospective participants took part in an in-depth screening process where they were asked about their availability, physical capability and motivation to work, and also completed a basic literacy test. Cohorts ranged from two to nine individuals, with new cohorts being admitted in sync with the hiring cycles of industry employers.

### Training

Participants were selected for three different types of in-demand entry-level occupations. A six-week training was called "front of house" which included being a server/host/barista/bar-back. An eight-week training was for entry-level line cook and a three-week training for Kitchen Helpers/Dishwashers. Though distinct training programs, they were often delivered concurrently and the enterprise delivered shared training elements, such as health and safety, soft skills, resume and job search core modules to participants as a large group.

## Support

Once participants completed training, they were connected to a placement coordinator who helped connect them to internship and employment opportunities. They were also connected to a “journey coach” who was a counsellor that supported them with their social needs. Lastly, participants had access to a job coach who provided coaching on skills development as well as support with behavioural or technical challenges participants may experience while on the job.

## Research and Evaluation

Participant data is collected at three different stages during intake, as well as after the program at intervals of one month, three months, six months and twelve months. Information is collected on training outcomes, income and wage outcomes, perceived value of the HWTC Program, job efficacy, and perceptions of supports and services that were accessed during the program.

## Employment

Upon completion of training, participants were connected to prospective employers within the hospitality industry for one to four week internships. If they didn't secure employment in this way, the Enterprise continued to work with the participant until they were able to find another job. Overall, the enterprise found that 80% of participants were able to get employment through internships.

## Follow-Up

When the enterprise was active, staff found that post-program connections with participants decreased as time went on. Training was short (3-10 weeks) and then participants moved into employment or other endeavours. Following training there was no additional formal programming, except 3,6 and 12-month formal follow-up. Staff efforts included emails, texts, and or phone calls for formal follow-ups. In addition, the Placement Coordinator would share employment opportunities regularly with those who were unemployed or who had lost employment if contact was available. Program alumni who were doing well were often more open to check-in types of follow-up. Often, those participants who didn't feel they were functioning well in their personal lives, experienced shame and were less willing to disclose how they were doing. Also, staff felt that many prior participants simply weren't interested in staying in touch with the enterprise once they had completed the program and moved on.

## Outcomes and Well-Being

Many HWTC participants who had engaged in employment were impacted by restaurant and hotel closures because of COVID. HWTC made efforts to re-engage all past participants and where there was interest to assist with identifying other employment opportunities or assisting with other life/economic stabilization assistance including applications for CERB and other emergency supports. Through the emergency meal preparation program, HWTC was also able to hire four former participants to support production, increasing their wages and provide them with benefits. They were especially happy to have contributed to work that was deemed essential and supported others in need at this time. Additionally, they are receiving more job security through this work, compared to not working and receiving EI or CERB.

Overall, the main supports that prior participants needed were income support and secure housing. Some expressed challenges paying rent, not feeling safe in their living situations and a threat of eviction from their landlords. They also experienced greater mental health challenges, which required connecting individuals into the mental health system for the first time.

## Future

Employment opportunities in the hospitality industry continue to be impacted by the pandemic and workforce development initiatives such as HWTC offered need to pivot to assist industry employers and workers at this time. HWTC is now working with displaced workers to leverage participants' skills for other types of work. Staff are in discussion with other stakeholders on mapping the skills of displaced workers into more demanding industries right now such as health care. Data on participants are being combined with different types of AI software to highlight their transferrable skills. They are also in the process of signing agreements with new employers and supporting former participants to move into new positions.

Most prior enterprise participants have expressed that they want to return to this industry and would be saddened to completely leave this type of work. Therefore, staff will look into supporting them to return to this work, once the economy is in a better place. If the enterprise were to open again in the post-pandemic future, their sense is to open as only a hospitality training center, without the restaurant.

## GATEWAY LINENS

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a reduction in laundering needs from emergency homeless shelters that serve as Gateway Linens' priority customers. This is because most shelters have now had to reduce residential capacity to maintain safe physical distancing. As many hotels in Toronto have now been re-purposed as emergency shelters, Gateway Linens has been able to maintain some laundering services to hotels, including fully taking over the administration and operation of the laundry shop in one of the hotels, with this laundry shop now serving as a satellite



to the main plant. Gateway Linens has also expanded the type of items it can launder, which in turn has modestly broadened its service base, thereby helping to maintain revenue targets.

For staff at the enterprise, a lot of time has been spent on regular reporting to Toronto Public Health, to ensure safety protocols are in place to remain fully operational. They have also limited bringing new participants into the program and have placed their shop-building facilities into lockdown to all but the most essential workers and services. In January 2021, one participant tested positive who has been residing in a shelter, and it was determined that this person contracted COVID-19 from being at the shelter. Subsequently another participant tested positive at the hotel where the satellite laundry shop is located. Therefore, with the second and now third wave of COVID-19, there has been heightened communication with participants and customers to ensure social distancing rules and other health and safety protocols are being rigidly followed. By early March 2021 almost 100 per cent of Gateway Linens staff have received at least their first vaccine dose, with second doses scheduled and confirmed. By the beginning of July 2021, the enterprise will be deemed to be fully immunized.

Gateway Linens was able to pay frontline essential worker subsidies, approved by both the Ontario government and The Salvation Army, for a period of almost eight months during 2020. This enabled staff, including participants, to receive enhanced pay and allowances as well as a monthly bonus from Gateway Linens. Many Salvation Army shelters, and other essential service organizations have had their pay subsidies reimbursed by the provincial government, however Gateway Linens, in part because of its status within The Salvation Army as a social enterprise, has unfortunately not received any reimbursements.

## Intake

All the participants, currently all males, are living within or have a near-past experience with the shelter system, or who are experiencing impermanent, unstable housing. Individuals also face barriers to employment resulting from current or near-past challenges such as addictions, criminal record, etc. There has been an interest in including females, and Gateway Linens' and The Salvation Army's mission and values promote unequivocal inclusivity so there is an equal interest in including 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, however, given that many within the shelter system and linked communities have experienced, and still experience, trauma including domestic violence and prejudice, concern for safety within a male-preponderant environment mandates that further consideration and planning is needed before the inclusivity goal can be realized.

In the past, most of Gateway Linens' referrals were from Salvation Army shelters, with some referrals from shelters and programs administered by other organizations such as Shepherds of Good Hope, Margaret's and the City of Toronto. Since 2016, Gateway Linens has expanded the number and variety of sources from which referrals are received, in order to be more widely encompassing and to better capture more people who meet their criteria. Only small numbers of individuals may be recruited at a time because it is increasingly rare that there are immediate openings into the program. As a result, prospective participants are usually on a wait list and serve in a relief capacity until there is a full-time opening. In the first few years Gateway Linens averaged no more than six to eight participants, however over time the enterprise has been able to

double the number of participants in the program. Currently, there are fifteen active participants, all in a scheduled full-time capacity.

## Training

Participants receive structured, hands-on training that includes direct work experience, targeted skills training and life skills training. Participants are provided the opportunity to experience various levels of tasks, such as shop team lead, digital production record-keeping, etc., with the support of an Operations Coordinator. It is recognized that Gateway Linens is not specifically training individuals to work in a laundry environment; instead, the industrial laundry is simply a vehicle to provide broader workplace training. As a result, participants are provided with a range of more general workplace-related training opportunities, certifications and licenses as well as training related to topics of expressed interest and aptitude such as computer literacy and financial literacy. Lastly, participants are supported with life skills development including skills for communication and relationship-building that are needed in any workplace and vocational setting. The overall objective of Gateway Linens is to model a safe, healthy, contemporary workplace.

## Participant Supports

Case managers and counsellors are also available to support participants with their short-term and long-term goals. Participants are afforded considerable flexibility in their scheduling, accompanied by encouragement and mentorship by staff and management, to attend appointments such as for counselling, parole/probation reporting, etc.

## Research and Evaluation

In terms of internal tracking, every 12 weeks (or less, depending on determination of need) the enterprise measures the progress of participants using a model of supervision known as Performance Excellence in Coaching (PEAC), and further supported in part by a U.K.-developed evaluation tool called Work Star. This allows for a more blended model that includes a highly personalized approach to supervision. The structure for supervision is based on a model of discussing participants' strengths and weaknesses, as well as their goals, which are reviewed regularly and revised as needed.

## Employment

Historically since Gateway Linens' inception, participants typically remained with the enterprise for up to 48 weeks, with the average being 26-32 weeks. However, due to more recent changes to the structure of how Gateway Linens participants are being more fairly compensated, management have noticed that there is far less incentive for participants to leave the enterprise for alternate

employment, unless the individual's goals and education/experience enable them to move to a more highly skilled vocation. At Gateway Linens, participants can maintain receiving their full OW/ODSP social benefits while receiving minimum wage, which is not taxable because of the structure of the program ("compensation" is actually deemed, per legislation, as a voluntary allowance from a registered charitable organization), whereas at another job, their OW/ODSP would be clawed back at a predetermined rate, based on their earnings. Therefore, although participants may be in a position to secure full-time work after the enterprise, it can be challenging for them to find a job that matches the same pay they were getting through the enterprise.

As Gateway Linens' work is recognized as an essential service, many participants have expressed appreciation in being able to come into work every day during the COVID-19 pandemic. A collective mindset has developed with many participants feeling, "we are all in this together." There was a worker appreciation acknowledgement that took place before the December 2020 holidays where every participant received a hoodie inscribed with a "hashtag" - #essentialworker - which became a source of pride for participants.

## Follow-Up

The enterprise has found that they can easily lose contact with participants after they have left the training, in large part due to the various challenges associated with their social circumstances. For instance, a too-common challenge is participants who may relapse from alcohol or drug use and are no longer permitted to stay in transitional housing, and therefore they experience homelessness again. For participants who have left the program, there is not a mechanism in place to adequately follow up with them to learn about their social outcomes and impacts.

Former participants who reconnect with Gateway Linens tend to have arrived at a better social position, such as acquiring permanent, quality employment or pursuing continued education, and attaining sustainable housing. It was noted that there is a pride that comes with the progress they have made in their lives, so there is a clear incentive to reconnect and share these experiences with staff.

## Outcomes and Well-Being

The biggest challenges for participants are mental health-related, including stress and worry. In present times, as a number of participants are residing in shelters or transitional housing, there is the increased stress of potentially contracting COVID-19 from these settings. In terms of positive outcomes, the most common has been participants being able to secure permanent and safe housing. They are able to secure this housing as a result of attaining financial stability from the financial allowances they are receiving through the enterprise. Another common outcome in participants is the pursuit of further education, and this relates back to financial stability as they now have the financial means to register in educational programs, to further their careers.

## Future

Prior to COVID-19, Gateway Linens was getting approached more frequently, unsolicited, to take on new business as their reputation was increasing. The enterprise's capacity to bring in more participants to the program is directly tied to their ability to generate new revenue. Given the infrastructure of the building and equipment, the enterprise can operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and therefore even with limited space, with more financial resources for supervision, they can increase shifts to allow for increased intake. Therefore, once there is more normalcy after the pandemic, Gateway Linens plans to revisit these business opportunities.

## SOCIAL COFFEE BEAN

The Social Coffee Bean was previously known as Destination Café with the name change being a result of a staff-led rebranding initiative. The name Destination Café was initially created by clients and staff; however, as part of a mini-makeover, staff felt it was important to undergo a name change to better reflect the social enterprise. They began working with a designer and after some discussions about the enterprise, the Social Coffee Bean emerged as a way of branding the café that felt more aligned to the social purpose. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the cafe has switched from being open to the public to providing curb side pick up and delivery of bulk orders. The cafe has not been open to the public since March 2020 to ensure the safety of our staff who may experience medical accommodations making them more vulnerable to COVID. Roasting of beans has continued in support of the curbside pick up and delivery model.

## DC Cleaning

DC cleaning provides cleaning services across various SHIP sites including offices, recreational centers, and other common spaces in our buildings. Additionally, DC Cleaning has a small number of contracts with regional and local organizations. At the beginning, this enterprise employed four to five individuals and over time, has grown to 33 employees. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, cleaning services continue to operate with approximately 80% of cleaning operations continuing in key areas. Additionally, DC Cleaning has been providing Bed Bug solutions to SHIP and other local not for profits and hospitals for the past few years.

## Intake

The enterprises employ individuals with significant barriers to successful employment including mental illness. The participants of the social enterprises include clients of SHIP and until the recent changes with the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), clients of ODSP where case managers provide supportive employment opportunities to clients. During the intake and referral process, participants share their unique needs, i.e., what's required for them to be successful, i.e. hours, transportation, environment, etc.

## Training

The Social Coffee Bean provides barista training with DC Cleaning employees being providing training on the job. For both the enterprises, learning on the job is supported by peers who have been in these roles. In addition, staff provide high level training on topics such as policies, health and safety procedures, expectations and communication. There is no predetermined number of days for the training but rather, participants begin to work independently once they express confidence in their ability to manage tasks on their own.

## Participant Supports

Supports are provided to participants/employees through the enterprise and associated case managers or counsellors. Supports are often very separate; one providing the social and mental health support with the enterprise supporting the employment piece. With participant consent, these supports are often provided in collaboration to support the success of each individual. In addition to this, the peer support that participants receive from one another assists with creating a supportive, flexible work environment that reduces barriers to success.

During COVID, SHIP has supported social enterprise clients with wellness and food security packages in support of staying at home and the increased isolation felt during the pandemic.

## Evaluation

Baseline data on participants is collected at the intake stage through SHIP, with this data mainly focused on participants' mental health histories and housing situations. Therefore, during their involvement with the enterprises, the social enterprise collects only data on employment, and not their social outcomes. As there have been participants who have been part of the enterprise for 12+ years, there isn't a distinct beginning, middle and end for data collection, as with other enterprises. Instead, check-ins take place on a regular basis.

Check-ins are guided by a document that participants have co-designed, outlining what they'd like to discuss. SHIP staff avoid using the language of performance reviews as this can elicit fear. Additionally, staff input indicated that the process would be different than the "goal setting" they often discuss with their case workers in the context of their mental health outcomes.

## Employment

As these two social enterprises are regarded as permanent employment, SHIP purposely doesn't provide support to transition participants out of the enterprises. However, if participants wanted to be employed beyond the enterprises, they would be supported in doing so. Participants tend to stay for years, ranging from two years to 12+ years.

SHIP has been intentional about providing supportive employment, which has equated to offering different types of work accommodations, as needed. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the café, shifts ranged from once a month to 2-3 shifts per week and for DC cleaning, shifts ranged from two to five days per week. An example of a more specific accommodation would be one participant whose mental health indicated that work for them that was best, was ‘predictable’ work. This translated into an admin role after other positions had been unsuccessfully explored with the individual having remained in this role for more than 8 years now.

## Former Participants & Follow-Up

Overall, follow-up has not been an issue as participants tend to stay with the enterprise for many years. Even if individuals leave the enterprise, they generally continue to remain as SHIP clients and therefore there have an ongoing connection to the parent organization. Many staff live with mental illness and are supported to take the necessary leaves they deem key in support of their recovery journey while ensuring that appropriate supports are in place to return to work when they are doing well.

As supportive, trusting relationships have been built with participants over the years, the enterprise gets to know them very well, including their background and social network. New and existing staff share what supports they may need in the future to get them through challenging times. Generally, when someone leaves the enterprise, the reasons have been shared through ongoing dialogue and is often due to being unwell for a period of time, and therefore unable to work. SHIP staff often receive communications from participants who left the enterprise several years back, which is a testament to the strong relationships that are cultivated.

## Outcomes and Well-Being

Positive outcomes have included:

- Participants’ ability to learn new skills in support of completing employment duties;
- Increased confidence to apply for community-based opportunities based on enhanced communication and organization skills;
- Development of knowledge and skills to transition to other roles within the social enterprises including product mixing (DC Cleaning), managing and delivering catering orders;
- Establishing the skill set to operate one of the café enterprises on their own;
- Staff becoming trainers of newly on-boarded staff; and

- The opportunity for staff to train clients in cleaning practices and conduct workshops around cleaning and hygiene.

As a result of COVID-19, participants' mental health has been impacted, as many have or are experiencing increased fear and anxiety. For this population, housing would normally be a challenge however SHIP supports them in securing and maintaining supportive housing. Overall, success is measured by the ability to maintain employment while overcoming existing barriers to success.

## Future

Future plans include the diversification of the existing social enterprises which has been necessitated and driven by the pandemic. Ideas include:

- Acceleration of existing of bed bug kit production which would include bed bug solution, coveralls, glue traps and education;
- Consideration for moving to a bulk coffee bean e-commerce model which will assist in reducing overhead costs; and
- Continuation of the cleaning business including securing new contracts post pandemic and project work.

## LOFT KITCHEN

Pre-COVID 19 and its associated restrictions and lockdowns, the enterprise's main source of earned revenue was external catering. Demand for catering disappeared at the outset of the pandemic as social gatherings and events were cancelled. During the first wave from March to June 2020, the enterprise was completely closed. The enterprise was unable to access government supports based upon percentage of lost revenue as it is situated within CONC, which expanded their shelters in response to COVID. The income of the organization increased as a whole, rendering the social enterprise ineligible for these supports. This decline in revenue led to lay offs and restructuring of key roles. Approximately 18 youth trainees were laid off and able to qualify for the CERB.

The enterprise has responded to changing conditions by developing new product and service offerings. There are limited catering contracts available which includes selling to hospitals and other organizations employing essential workers. LOFT Kitchen now sells pre-packaged lunches and dinners, newly named as "Fork Out Fridays". The enterprise now also has a farmer's market which runs on weekends and sells various produce and homemade food items, including jams and baked goods. The farmer's market was outdoors during the summer of 2020 and has moved indoors for the fall and winter seasons. They have also began selling packaged brunch on Saturdays. These new services are advertised through their mailing list, social media and through

word-of-mouth in the surrounding neighbourhood. Lastly, the enterprise has been creative in generating additional means for generating revenue. This includes renting out the kitchen, the café and the building for private events. It also includes selling wholesale and original merchandise, including candy and packaged snacks, children's games and even craft kits created by youth training staff.

## Intake

The enterprise aims to hire youth between the ages of 16 to 29 who are facing social barriers to employment. In the past two years, they have focused more on supporting youth who identify within LGBTQ+ communities. Outreach for the program has mainly been through two channels, United Way's LGBTQ culinary program and pre-employment programs run by other charitable agencies.

Given the COVID pandemic, participants of the early 2020 cohort were laid off and after a four-month hiatus, the new youth that were hired were younger, between the ages of 15 to 17. These youth live relatedly close to the enterprise, and therefore can walk or bike to work, and avoid being on public transit. Typically, these youth would be in school however given online schooling due to COVID, some have dropped out or decided to take a pause from schooling.

## Training

Youth are trained in large scale catering, back of house and line cook prep, working with volunteers, serving meals and learning front of house customer service and barista skills. Youth also learn from professional chefs and experienced restaurant managers. Training begins with employability skills training and then the kitchen training is spread over twelve weeks. Some of the training is structured (e.g., kitchen safety, knife safety) however there is flexibility in the training model where participants direct what they'd like to learn. For culinary skills, this can include having more training on baking or cooking certain cultural foods and for café skills, this can include more complicated barista skills, administrative tasks or event planning. Given COVID, training has adapted to include building skills for peripheral jobs including customer service and administrative tasks, and training on cleaning and maintenance, which is relevant to many job prospects.

## Employment Supports

The enterprise provides informal employment supports, which can include support with resume-building, interview skills and networking. CONC partners with two community agencies in Toronto called Eva's and St. Stephen's which provide support with youth wages.



## Evaluation

The enterprise doesn't conduct formal internal evaluation activities on an on-going basis. Evaluation activities have mainly been conducted through and with support from funders and partners.

## Employment

Prior to COVID, after completing their training program, participants could stay at LOFT to work in the café or in catering when positions were available, or they could be connected to a placement at one of LOFT's culinary partners, or they could be referred to a suitable new training/educational program. Catering contracts included catering for CONC programs, OCAD University, the University of Toronto, city hall and community agencies such as Sistering. Youth cooks have also been employed at The McEwan Group, the Fairmont Hotel, Oliver & Bonacini Restaurants, and numerous cafes and coffee shops in the GTA.

## Outcomes and Well Being

Staff noticed that youth who were employed during the first wave of COVID demonstrated noticeably high anxiety. The anxiety stemmed from being in an in-person job, taking transit to get to work and the fear of contracting COVID and passing this on to their children or other family members at home. For those employees with children, many didn't have adequate childcare arrangements in place to work during the pandemic.

## Future

In the initial years, LOFT kitchen functioned more as a program to train youth in hospitality, however over the years, trainees have become part of LOFT's business model. Additionally, the enterprise had strengthened their business operations, such that their funding from grants (before COVID) was complemented by revenue from the enterprise. At this time, they are unsure if external catering is a viable business option for the future and so they plan to continue with their new, creative avenues for generating revenue.

# OUTCOME MEASURES AT YEAR 2

The research team had originally identified a broad set of outcomes that would be tracked for participants for the three-year follow-up period. The intention was to capture these measures at intake and at each of the follow-up points, either through linking to existing intake, process and

administrative data, follow-up surveys or interviews. The following is the initial list of outcome measures that have been captured in the project's surveys to date.

- **Employment, earnings and income** – Participant's employment status, as well as their hours worked per week, earnings, job type and income sources.
- **Housing situation** – Participant's housing situation, including measures of housing stability and usage of housing/shelter services.
- **Participation in education/training** – Participant's enrolment in further educational or training programs.
- **Career activation** – Participants' self-efficacy and confidence in finding employment and making decisions about their career.
- **Self-care** – Participants' self-reported incidence of key self-care activities.
- **Self-esteem and self-efficacy** – Participants' self-esteem and general confidence.
- **Social support** – Participants' perceptions of social support in a number of life domains.

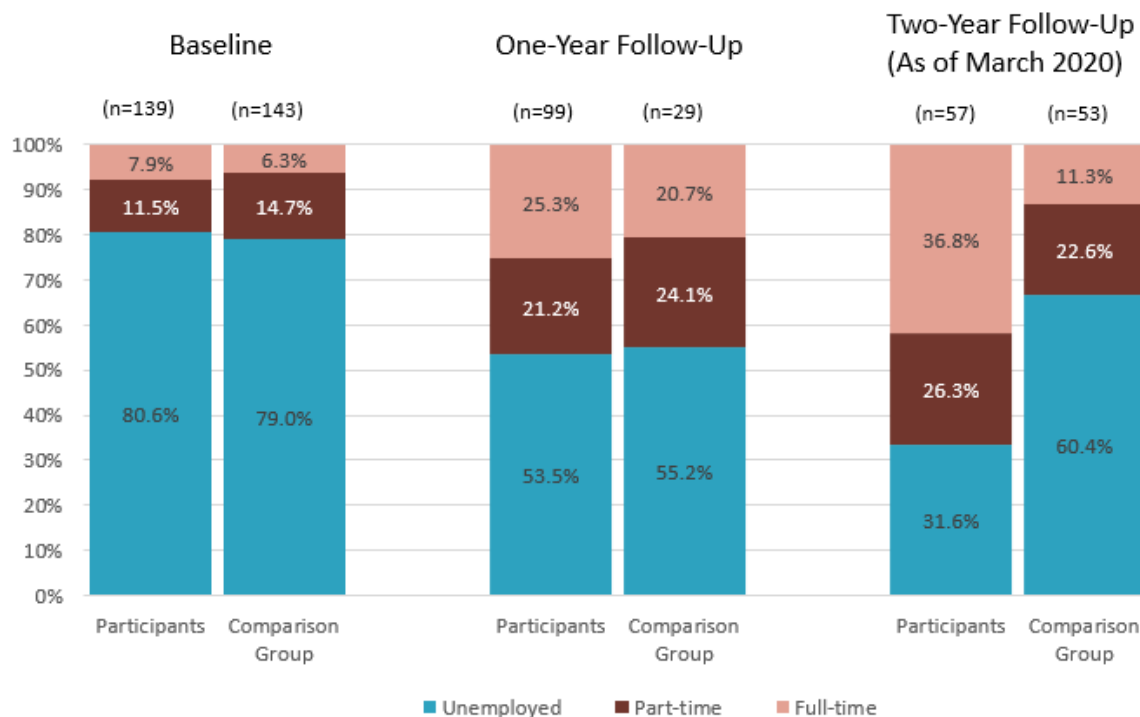
Through discussion with partners soon after the start of COVID-19, it was clear that the pandemic would have a significant impact on participants, particular those who were in more vulnerable situations due to the nature of the industry in which they were working, the type of positions that they held, or their personal circumstances. As a result, the project team and partners discussed possibilities to adjust the surveys to capture how participants were being affected by a situation that threatened their mental and physical health, their employment, and their support systems. At the same time, the Community Researcher team had to adjust its participant engagement approaches to reflect the reality that it would not be able to connect with partners or participants in-person.

In consultation with the WISE partners, the Year 2 follow-up survey was adjusted to add questions to capture participants' experiences in the midst of the pandemic. At the suggestion of a WISE partner, the team worked with the partners to add questions to capture participants' experiences with systemic racism given the high proportion of visible minorities among their WISE participants. The team also co-created a list of supports and related resources that would be provided to the Community Researcher team and included in the survey as a referral source for participants.

A preliminary set of results for the Year 2 survey are provided below, with a more fulsome analysis of all survey findings for the project to be detailed in the project's final report. The following chart

illustrates the changes in employment rates for both WISE and comparison groups from intake (baseline), after one-year, and as of March 2020, before Ontario entered a widespread lockdown.

**Figure 4 Changes in Employment from Baseline to Two-Year Follow-Up**



Given that most participants were completing their two-year survey after the pandemic lockdown, the research team and partners agreed that such an approach was necessary, as it was expected that a large majority of participants would lose their jobs—at least temporarily—which would distort employment rates for this survey wave. Participants were therefore asked to indicate their employment as of March 2020 in addition to their current employment situation. This comparison shows that while the unemployment rate had increased slightly for comparison group members, WISE participants on average reported a 21.9 percentage point decline in unemployment as of March 2020.

Table 3 provides the full breakdown of both groups’ average employment rates both before and during the pandemic. It indicates that there was, on average, a 22.7 percentage point difference in the average employment rates of both groups just prior to the pandemic, which is significant at the 5 per cent level. The table also shows significant differences in the extent to which COVID-19 had an impact on both groups’ employment situations, with WISE group members 11.8 percentage points more likely to report that their hours were reduced as a result of the pandemic.

It is also clear from the table that COVID-19 essentially halved both groups' employment rates, with only 33.3 per cent of WISE group members reporting that they were employed when completing the survey, compared to 20.8 per cent of comparison group members. In terms of differences in employment conditions for both groups, the only statistically significant difference is the proportion who are employed full-time, with WISE group members 11.6 percentage points more likely to be in full-time positions at the time of completing their surveys.

**Table 3 Participants' Employment and Income at Year 2**

	Comparison Group (N=53)	WISE Group (N=57)	Difference		Standard Errors
<b>Pre-COVID19 Employment (N=109 responses)</b>					
<b>Employed in the 12 months before COVID19 (%)</b>	43.4	66.1	22.7	**	(9.4)
<b>Categories of employment in the 12 months before COVID-19 (%)</b>					
Not employed in the past 12 months	56.6	33.9	-22.7	**	(9.4)
1-6 months	26.4	30.4	3.9		(8.7)
7-11 months	5.7	14.3	8.6		(5.8)
Constantly employed over past 12 months	11.3	21.4	10.1		(7.1)
<b>Employment Impacts since COVID-19 (N=110 responses)</b>					
<b>Employed as of March 2020, before COVID-19 lockdown (%)</b>	34.0	63.2	29.2	***	(9.2)
<b>Employment categories as of March 2020, before COVID-19 lockdown (%)</b>					
Not working	60.4	31.6	-28.8	***	(9.2)
Working part-time	22.6	26.3	3.7		(8.3)
Working full-time	11.3	36.8	25.5	***	(7.9)
Other (on leave, student)	5.7	5.3	-0.4		(4.4)
<b>COVID19 employment impact categories (%)</b>					
Lost my job, have since been rehired	5.8	8.8	3.0		(5.0)
Lost my job, remain unemployed	17.3	26.3	9.0		(8.0)
Reduced my hours	5.8	17.5	11.8	*	(6.2)
No change	50.0	38.6	-11.4		(9.5)
Other (e.g., multiple of the above, delays in hiring/training)	21.2	8.8	-12.4	*	(6.7)
<b>Current employment since COVID-19 (N=110 responses)</b>					
<b>Currently employed (%)</b>	20.8	33.3	12.6		(8.5)
<b>Current employment categories (%)</b>					
Not working	79.2	66.7	-12.6		(8.5)
Working part-time	11.3	12.3	1.0		(6.2)
Working full-time	9.4	21.1	11.6	*	(6.9)
<b>Current type of employment (%)</b>					
Unemployed	79.2	66.7	-12.6		(8.5)

Permanent, ongoing position	11.3	15.8	4.5	(6.6)
Other: temporary, fixed term, casual, self-employed, other	9.4	17.5	8.1	(6.6)
<b>Current Income categories</b>				
Unemployed	80.8	67.9	-12.9	(8.4)
<= \$14.00	3.8	5.4	1.5	(4.1)
\$14.01 - \$18.50	7.7	10.7	3.0	(5.6)
>\$18.51	7.7	16.1	8.4	(6.3)

**Current income (N=110 responses)**

**Current income sources (as many as applicable) (%)**

Wages, honorarium, or incentives from WISE or other organization	13.5	11.8	-1.7	(6.6)
ODSP (Ontario Disability Support)	36.5	11.8	-24.8	*** (8.2)
OW (Ontario Works)	23.1	25.5	2.4	(8.5)
EI (Employment Insurance)	5.8	15.7	9.9	(6.1)
Other paid employment	7.7	15.7	8.0	(6.3)
Family and friends	9.6	11.8	2.1	(6.1)
CERB	5.8	25.5	19.7	*** (6.9)

Source: SRDC year 2 follow-up surveys. Other income sources were omitted from this table due to low response (ODSP Extended Health benefits, CPP, etc.) Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

Given the importance of participants' housing situation to this research study, Year 2 survey results on changes in participants' housing situation as well as their worries about their housing are provided in Table 4. The table shows that while there were some differences in the extent to which WISE and comparison group members reported that they had experienced a change in their housing situation, these differences were not statistically significant. In one case, WISE participants were 15.4 percentage points more likely to report their housing had changed, but that change in housing was neither better nor worse than it was a year prior. WISE participants are also 12.1 percentage points less likely to report that they are always worried about housing – a difference that is significant at the 10 per cent level.

**Table 4 Participants' Housing Situation at Year 2**

	Comparison Group	WISE Group	Difference	Standard Errors
<b>Housing situation (%)</b>				
has not changed in the past 12 months	73.6	64.9	-8.7	(8.9)
has improved in the past 12 months	13.2	7.0	-6.2	(5.7)
has become worse in the past 12 months	7.5	7.0	-0.5	(5.0)
has changed but it is not better or worse than it was 12 months ago	5.7	21.1	15.4	** (6.4)

<b>Worried about housing (%)</b>	52.8	50.9	-2.0	(9.6)
<b>Worried about housing categories (%)</b>				
Always worried about housing	22.6	10.5	-12.1	* (7.0)
Sometimes worried about housing	30.2	40.4	10.2	(9.2)
Never worried about housing	47.2	49.1	2.0	(9.6)

Source: SRDC year 2 follow-up surveys. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

Table 5 details the extent to which both groups indicated that they had experienced incidents of racial discrimination in the few months prior to completing the survey. It should be noted that participants were made aware that these questions were optional, so the responses should be treated with caution with respect to representing the experiences of all participants. Response rates for each question are provided individually.

**Table 5 Participants' Experiences of Discrimination**

	<b>Comparison Group</b>	<b>WISE Group</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Standard Errors</b>
<b>Experienced discrimination in the past few months (%)</b> (N=93 responses)	54.8	47.1	-7.7	(10.5)
<b>Experienced discrimination frequency (%)</b> (N=93 responses)				
Never	45.2	52.9	7.7	(10.5)
A few isolated incidents	26.2	21.6	-4.6	(8.9)
From time to time	23.8	19.6	-4.2	(8.6)
Regularly	4.8	5.9	1.1	(4.7)
<b>Discrimination impacting well-being</b> (1= not at all, 5 a great deal) (N=43 responses)	3.1	3.1	0.0	(0.3)
<b>Discrimination situation (%)</b> (N=40 responses)				
In work situations (applications, workplace, promotions)	42.9	52.6	9.8	(16.1)
Accessing services (Training, services, housing, organizations)	14.3	21.1	6.8	(12.3)
None of these situations	42.9	26.3	-16.5	(15.3)

Source: SRDC year 2 follow-up surveys. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

Overall, there are no statistical differences in the extent to which participants who answered the questions in both groups reported that they had recent experiences of racial discrimination. Approximately half of both groups (54.8 per cent of comparison group participants and 47.1 per cent of WISE participants) who answered the question had at least one experience in the past few months. A nearly equal proportion of both groups had experienced either a few isolated incidents or reported having experiences from time to time. Approximately five per cent of both groups reported having regular experiences of racial discrimination. Participants indicated that the largest share of incidents occurred in the workplace, in situations such as when applying for a job, working with others, or being considered for promotion.

In addition to the impact of COVID-19 on participants' employment, the project team and WISE partners were interested in learning how it might have affected participants in other areas of their lives. These results are shown in Table 6 below. Similar to the questions regarding experiences of racial discrimination, these questions were optional for participants to answer, so response rates for each question are provided individually.

**Table 6 Impact of COVID-19 on Areas Other than Employment**

	Comparison Group	WISE Group	Difference	Standard Errors
<b>Experienced impact of COVID-19 (%) (N=110)</b>	69.81	71.93	2.12	(8.74)
<b>Number of areas impacted by COVID-19 (out of 5)</b>	1.53	1.21	-0.32	(0.24)
<b>Impact of COVID-19 categories (%) (N=78)</b>				
Physical or mental health	70.27	48.78	-21.49	* (11.03)
Income	48.65	46.34	-2.31	(11.47)
Housing	13.51	12.20	-1.32	(7.68)
Personal or family circumstances	45.95	24.39	-21.56	** (10.65)
Social or community support system	40.54	36.59	-3.96	(11.17)

Source: SRDC year 2 follow-up surveys. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks: \* - 10%, \*\* - 5%, \*\*\* - 1%.

The table shows that a large majority (approximately 70 per cent) of both groups had been affected by the pandemic in one or more ways listed in the survey. For members of both groups who answered the questions, the area that was impacted the most was their physical or mental health, with a significantly larger proportion of comparison group members indicating that they were affected in this area. Both groups reported similar levels of impact in terms of their income housing, and social or community support systems. WISE group members were significantly less likely to indicate that COVID-19 had affected their personal or family circumstances.

## YEAR 3 FOLLOW-UP PREPARATION AND ACTIVITIES

In April 2021, the project team will begin preparations for launching the final follow-up survey for participants. The project team and WISE partners will meet in the coming months to build on the Year 2 findings. It is expected that these adjustments will involve providing more of a retrospective examination of participants' employment journeys, including their perspectives of what may have happened had the pandemic not occurred. The surveys will also capture participants' perspectives on the role that the skills, experience and/or other supports they received from the WISE played in those journeys, particularly with respect to their ability and attitudes to finding and/or sustaining employment in challenging circumstances. The research team will also be working with each WISE

partner to complete their assessment of changes in their business operations as well as their perspectives on participant outcomes post-pandemic. These assessments will include their perspectives on any changes in their evaluation approaches as a result of participating in the research study.

The completion of the project's quasi-experimental analysis will rely heavily on the ability of the partners to maximize participant responses for both the WISE and comparison group members. The intent of this analysis is to use propensity score weighting to ensure that the distributions of baseline characteristics of both groups are as balanced as possible. After the propensity score adjustment, any differences in outcomes between program group and matched comparison group will therefore be attributable to the program intervention under the assumption of no systematic difference in unobservable characteristics. This type of analysis requires sufficient sample sizes to employ a difference-in-difference estimator for each outcome of interest, in order to measure the degree to which changes in each outcome for the program group exceeded those of the comparison group. Therefore, much of the focus of the final year of project operations will be to complete follow-up surveys with as many participants as possible in order to provide accurate estimates of the long-term impact of the WISE interventions based on the project's three years of follow-up data.



