

Planning for Life

Results Report for the Operation Come Home Finance Matters Program



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report marks the first evaluation that looks at the impact of financial literacy training on 75 street-involved youth, served by Operation Come Home in Ottawa, Canada.

Some highlights of the data in this report include the following:

- 91% of youth who enrolled in the program saw it through to completion.
- 60% of participants were in debt when they entered the program.
- 49% of participants made use of payday loan companies.
- 5 youth enrolled in addictions counselling while taking the program, some citing a new awareness of the financial cost of their addiction as the reason for doing so.
- 78% of participants found course components to be helpful or very helpful upon completion, and 92% identified budgeting as the most helpful.
- 97% of participants would recommend Financial Matters to a peer.

Youth who participated in the six-month follow-up survey:

- Maintained consistent participation rates in employment and educational opportunities
- Appear to have maintained stability in housing and living conditions
- Had an 11-15% increase in confidence, goal-setting, and financial knowledge
- 45% increase in youth who stated they were able to make a budget and plan for the future
- 50% increase in youth who felt well informed on matters that will affect their financial goals

For more details on housing, education, and job retention outcomes please refer to the Participant Outcomes section of this report.

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to measure the impact of financial literacy training on job, school, and housing retention among at-risk and street-involved youth served by Operation Come Home (OCH) in Ottawa, Canada. The evaluation also sought to discover whether youth are making more informed financial decisions after taking the course.

1. Did youth improve their knowledge of financial literacy?
2. Were youth able to utilize that knowledge to improve their living situations?
3. Were youth better able to maintain job stability after taking the course?
4. Did youth have greater educational successes associated with taking the course?
5. How can the program be improved to increase success?

BACKGROUND

Operation Come Home (OCH) provides employment, life-skills, and educational programs for street-involved and at-risk youth in the Ottawa area. The organization often serves as the first point of contact for at-risk youth to enter into various harm reduction, treatment, and/or counselling programs.

The transient and unstable nature of the lives of street-involved youth is one of the largest challenges youth face when trying to gain steady employment, finish high school, and/or establish stable homes.

Young people who access OCH services are not likely to have basic money management or budgeting skills. Many are in debt, use fringe financial institutions, and have little or no savings. These basic skills are important components to individual success in setting and achieving goals.

The following report tracks the experiences of 75 youth who were enrolled in the Finance Matters program at Operation Come Home from January 2012 to November 2013. Finance Matters is a four- to six-week financial literacy course that provides information on debt, savings, budgeting, credit and credit reports, investing, banking, income, and taxes. The goal of the program is for participants to increase their financial knowledge and develop the ability to make sound financial decisions.

Group and one-on-one coaching sessions are used to assist OCH youth in developing real-life financial plans for themselves. Youth are able to access ongoing support beyond their enrolment in the program, as well as develop short and long-term goals in order to become and remain financially stable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In late 2011, Measuredoutcome.org was commissioned by Operation Come Home to undertake an evaluation of the SEDI-TD Bank-funded Finance Matters program.

Thanks to OCH staff, Jamie Hammond and Ashley Mathieu, as well as to the program participants who voluntarily participated in this report. Thanks, also, to Morag McAleese and to Diego Sanchez de Lozada for their contributions.

Written by Rebecca Thomas and Stephen Couchman, December 2013.

FINANCIAL LITERACY – WHAT IS IT?

In a 2008 report on financial inclusion for at-risk populations, SEDI defines financial literacy as including the following elements:

Financial knowledge and understanding:

The ability to make sense of and manipulate money in its different forms, uses, and functions, including the ability to deal with everyday financial matters and make the right choices for one's own needs.

Financial skills and competence:

The ability to apply knowledge and understanding across a range of contexts including both predictable and unexpected situations and also including the ability to manage and resolve any financial problems or opportunities.

Financial responsibility:

The ability to appreciate the wider impact of financial decisions on personal circumstances, the family, and the broader community, and to understand rights, responsibilities, and sources of advice or guidance.

Financial capability is exhibited through the following behaviours, with the first two indicators being the strongest indicators in this population group:

1. Keeping track of financial resources:

Demonstrating you know how much your own resources are worth and where they are kept.

2. Making ends meet:

Keeping expenditures within your available resources. This includes accessing additional resources when required.

3. Planning ahead:

Demonstrating forethought to expected and unexpected events. Typically this involves some form of saving.

4. Choosing products:

Demonstrating an ability to choose among available financial products to select those most suited to your own needs. Typically this involves some willingness and ability to shop around and compare financial products across and within providers.

5. Staying informed:

Actively staying abreast of developments that are likely to affect your personal financial circumstances.¹

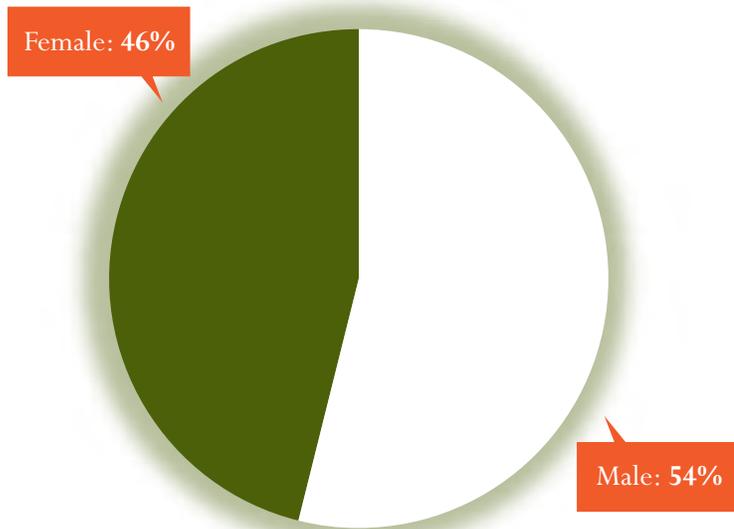
¹ Financial Inclusion For Homeless Persons and Those at Risk. A Step Up on the Ladder of Self-Sufficiency. Spring, 2008, SEDI, Adam Fair, Barb Gosse, Hollis Moore, Jennifer Robson.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following includes the results of entry and exit surveys for Financial Matters participants along with input from course coordinators. Three- and six-month follow-up surveys were also conducted with a smaller number of original participants who remained involved with OCH over a longer period.

Program Entry Survey Results Demographics

Gender



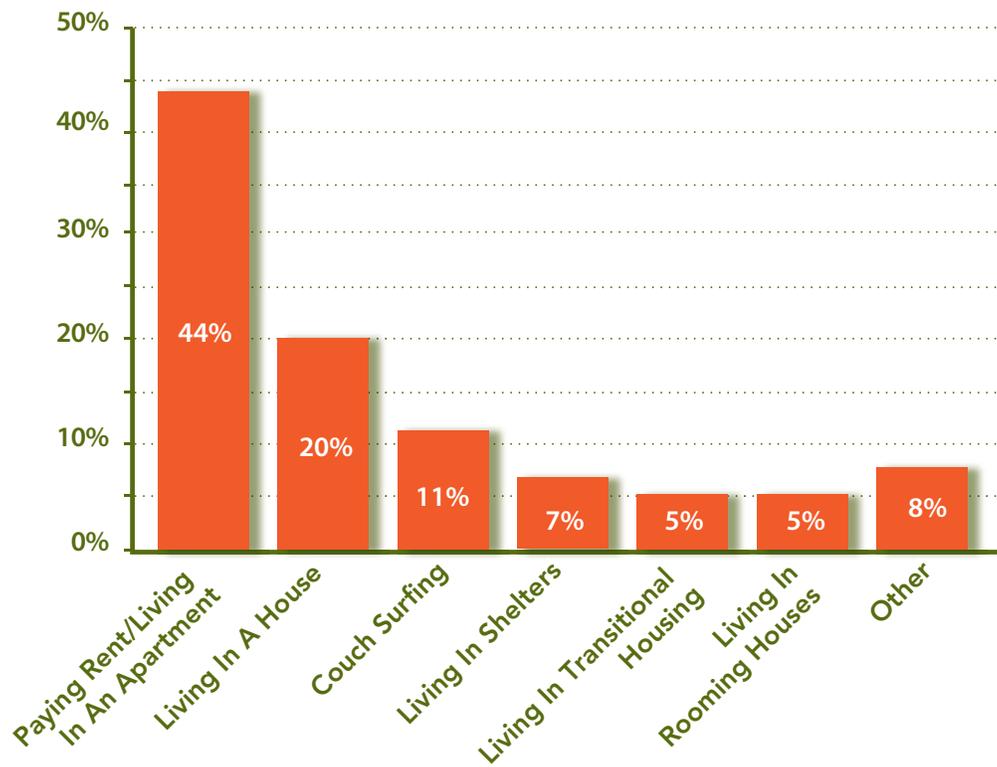
Age



Dependents

16% of participating youth have dependents

Living Situation



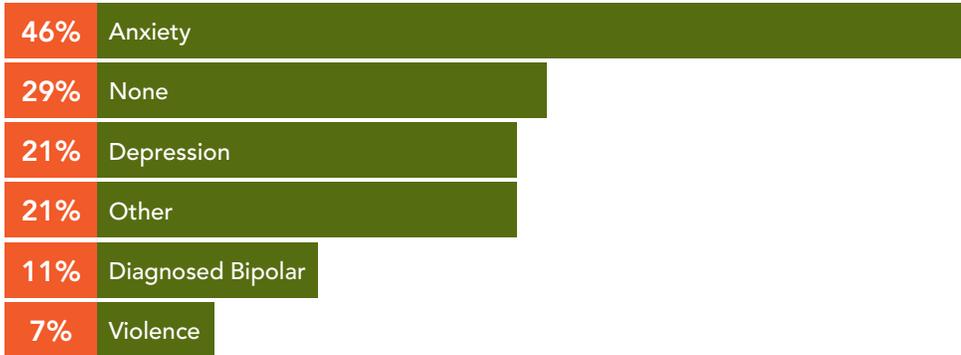
It should be noted that in this population, living situations are often unstable and change regularly.



Photo credit: Ashley Mathieu

71% of participating youth reported a mental health concern

(Many youth cited more than one mental health concern. These chart numbers reflect all issues cited by survey respondents.)

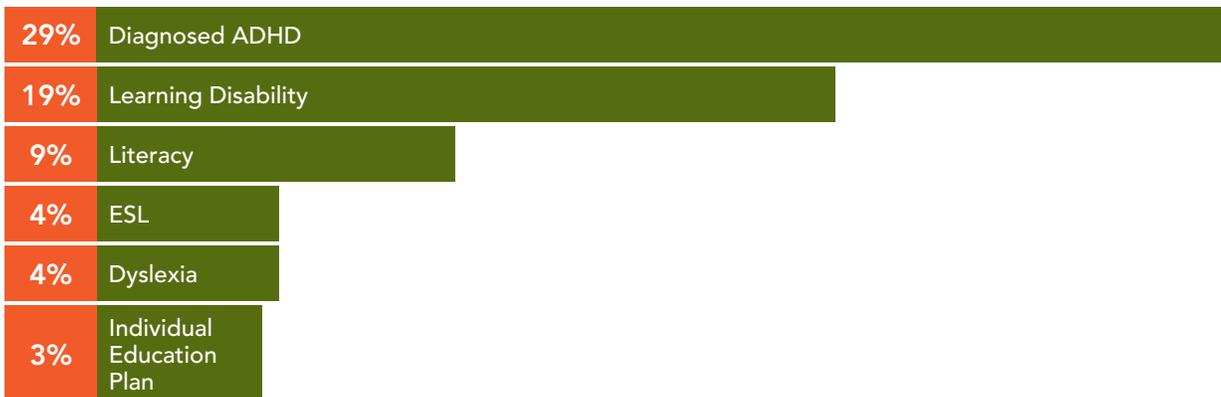


(“Other” includes Schizophrenia, HPPD, PTSD, OCD, BPD, among other issues)

33% of youth reported substance addiction issues

64% of Finance Matters participants have special education needs

(Some youth cited more than one special education need. These chart numbers reflect all issues cited by survey respondents.)



FINANCIAL PATTERNS

Youth entering the program had multiple issues in their relationships to money and financial services. Some had a deep distrust for financial institutions while many made active use of fringe financial institutions. Some details of youth entering the program are as follows.

77% of participants had a bank account on entry to the program.

Those who did not cited the following reasons for not having one:

52% – Don't have the proper ID²

24% – Don't trust banks

24% – Other

"Other" includes: "I didn't see a point," "Revenue Canada will steal my money," "Never opened one because I never had money to put in," "Other accounts have been shut down by the banks."

Use of Fringe Financial Services

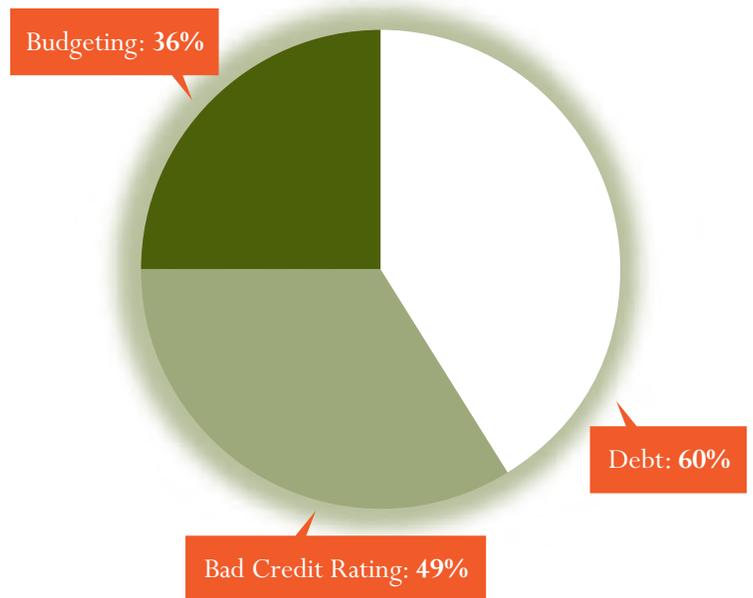
59% (44) of the entry evaluation participants used fringe financial services, such as payday loans or cheque cashing services. 33% (14) of the youth who used fringe services used them at least once a month.

60% of youth who entered the program were struggling with debt. Youth debt was primarily in the form of cell phone bills, city fines, credit card bills, collection agencies, personal debt, fringe financial services, OSAP, and formal loans.

What are your current financial setbacks?

(Many youth cited more than one financial setback. These chart numbers reflect all issues cited by survey respondents.)

51% of the youth who entered the program came with the primary goal of learning how to budget.



² Four of these nine youth were able to acquire the necessary identification required to set up bank accounts by the end of the program.

What is your primary financial goal in taking this program?



“I don’t want to be broke.”

“When I get a paycheque I don’t have any left after the weekend.”

“Because you can’t save money without learning how to budget first.”

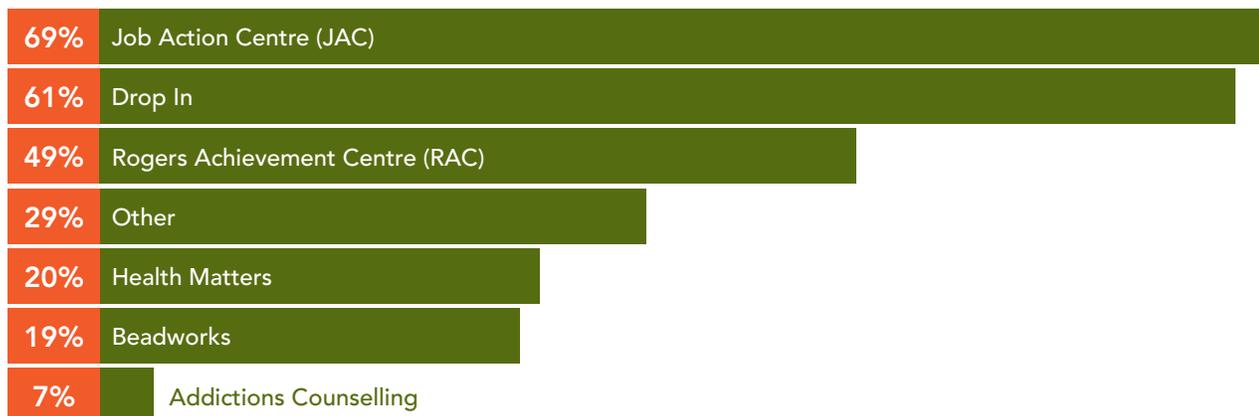
“To learn how to possess stable housing and pay debt.”

“I need to start planning a future for me and my kids, especially because I want to go back to school.”

Other Programs Accessed by Youth

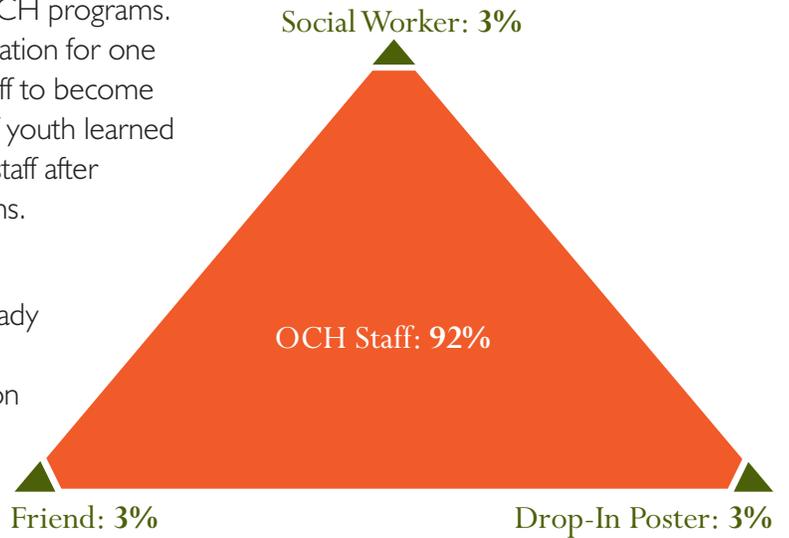
In addition to Finance Matters, 100% of youth also participated in other programs at OCH.

(Many youth cited using more than one OCH program. These chart numbers reflect all programs used by survey respondents.)



Cross-referral is a strength of the OCH programs. Youth may connect with the organization for one purpose, and are encouraged by staff to become involved in other programs. 92% of youth learned about the FM Program from OCH staff after becoming engaged in other programs.

Participation in OCH programs by Finance Matters youth remained steady through the exit surveys and two follow-up surveys, with the exception of the addictions counselling program, which saw a marked increase in participation over the course of the program.



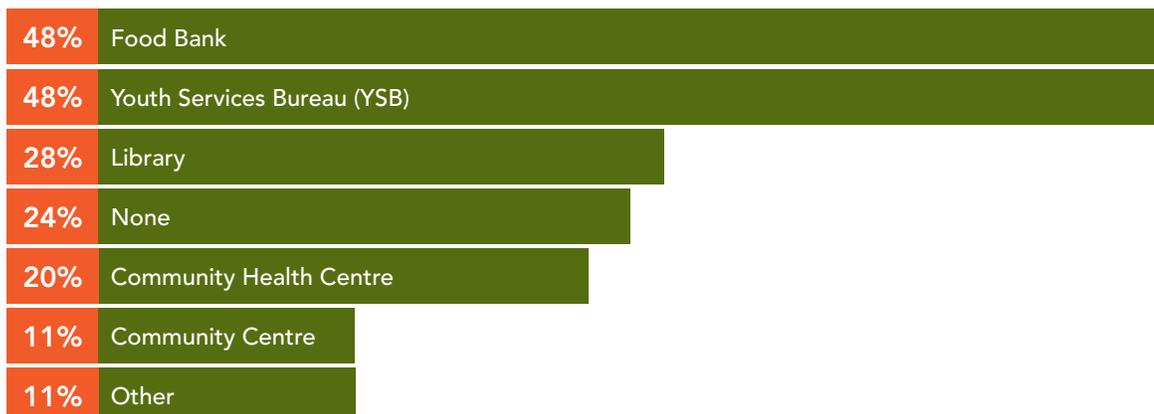
“[It’s] easier to do your taxes than I thought. [I] cut down the purchasing of marijuana by almost ¾. More food is in the house.”

From entry to exit, there was a 100% increase (from 5 to 10) in youth who sought addictions counselling from OCH staff.

This could be due, partly, at least, to the new awareness that the youth have of how much money they are spending on drugs.

Which other community programs do you use?

76% of youth enrolled in Finance Matters used other programs in the community: (Many youth cited using more than one community program. These chart numbers reflect all programs used by survey respondents.)



Exit Survey

The exit survey was conducted as the youth left the program. 68 youth completed exit surveys.

Course Completion Rate

91% completed the course

4% completed at least 6 hours

5% did not complete the program

Four of the youth who left the program early are still in contact with OCH staff.

Given the transient nature of this population, this is a very high completion rate.

*At program entry, 77% of youth had bank accounts.
On program exit, 84% had bank accounts.*

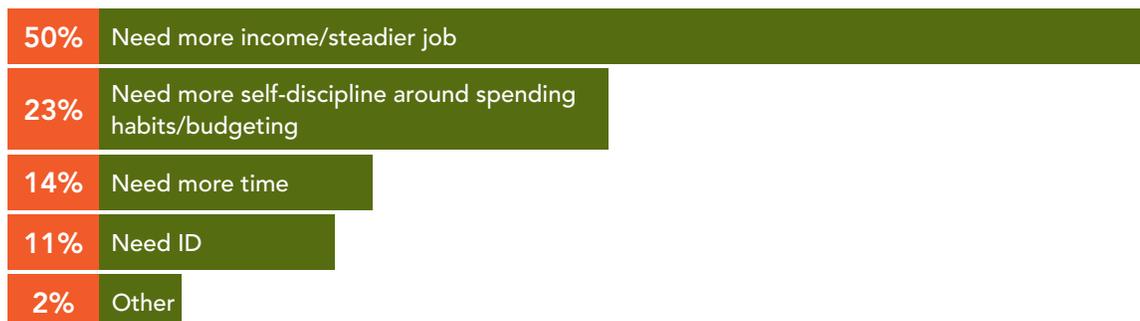
Have you reached your short-term financial goal that you set at the beginning of the program?

40% ALMOST

28% YES

32% NO

For those who had not yet reached their short-term goals upon completion of the program, the requirements to reach the goals were cited as follows:



For those youth who had reached their goals, 68% had set new financial goals for themselves.

I am confident that I will reach my existing or new financial goals.

59% of participants were confident

27% of participants were very confident

14% of participants couldn't say

How did you like different parts of the program?

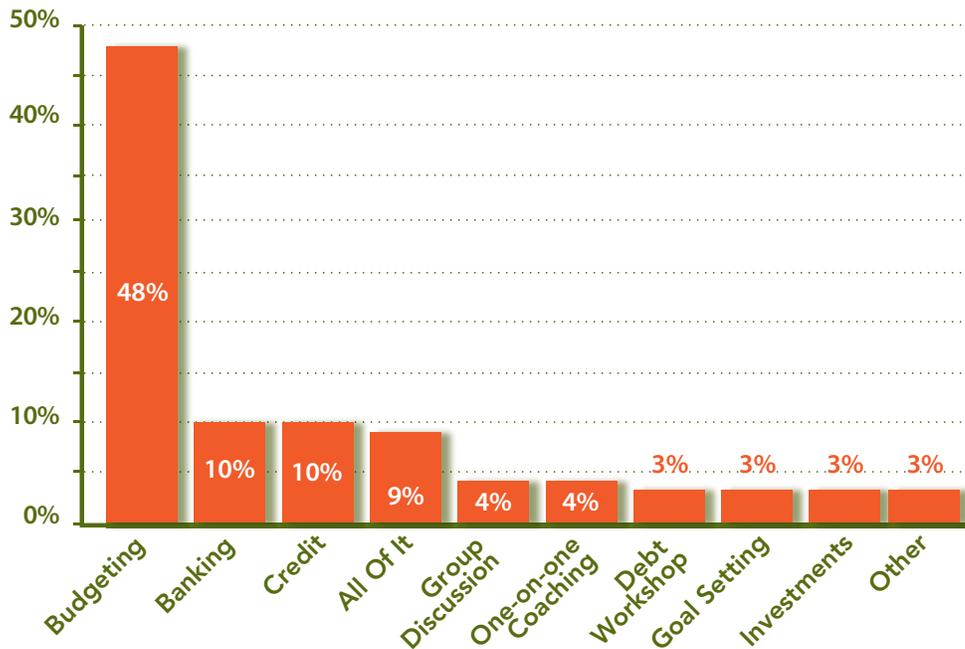
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
Instructors	73%	22%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Individual Coaching	56%	28%	1%	0	0%	15%
Financial Support	47%	43%	6%	0%	0%	4%
Group Classes	31%	44%	12%	2%	1%	10%
Speakers*	18%	14%	0%	1%	0%	67%

**It should be noted that speakers were not available for every cohort. When speakers were made available, the youth responded well to that program component.*



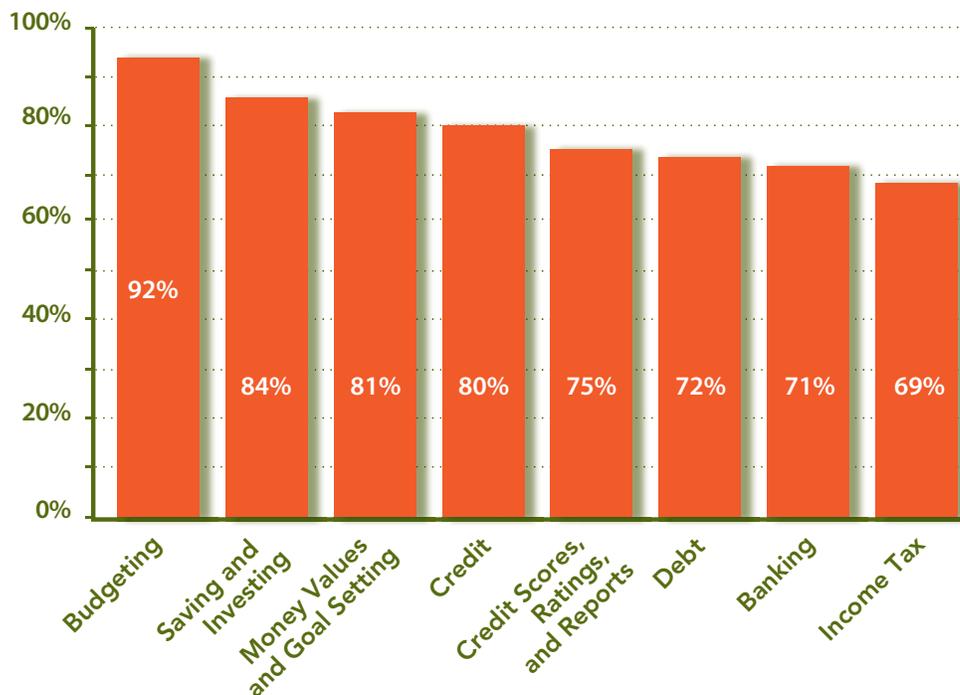
Photo credit: Ashley Mathieu

What part of Finance Matters was the most helpful to you?



“Knowing that we could come and talk to you (instructor) if we needed financial help with anything.”

How helpful did you find the following classes to be?



What is the most surprising/interesting thing that you learned?

“ Other people are in the same boat as me in terms of their lack of financial knowledge. That I am not alone.”

“ Creditors don’t go away.”

“ How much it ‘actually’ costs when you use \$1,000 in credit. And the savings you can earn through compound interest.”

“ How many ways you can bank.”

“ How to be confident about myself.”

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 75 youth who participated in the entry evaluation, 30 (40%) continued contact with program staff and participated in the final, six-month survey. Once again, given the transient nature of the population, the lower participation rate in the six-month survey makes interpretation of the results difficult, and results might not be statistically valid; however, they are interesting. In that OCH serves highest risk youth, it is likely that those who maintain contact with the organization over longer periods, face bigger challenges and by nature are not as successful as their peers who have learned enough to stabilize their situations. It is also not known whether their situations have deteriorated since being involved in the program.

Data below shows entry and follow-up results exclusively from these 30 program participants who completed both the entry and the six-month follow-up surveys.



Photo credit: David Pasho, Ideas on the Edge

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

Among those participants who kept in contact with program staff and chose to participate in the evaluation, the following trends have been noticed.

The youth who stayed in contact with program staff were less likely to have full-or part-time employment (30% were unemployed, compared to 13% in the “lost contact” group), but were more likely to be enrolled in an education program (36% were in school programs, compared to 10% of the “lost contact” group).

The youth who kept in contact with staff were also more active in other programs that OCH offers, with the exception of the Job Action Centre (JAC).

The program participation numbers are consistent with the education and employment rates noted above.

Other OCH Programs Used		
	Contact %	No Contact %
Drop-In	67	57
JAC	53	78
RAC	43	13
Health Matters	30	13
Beadworks	30	9

Of the youth who stayed in touch with staff, most continued participation in the above programs for the six-month period.



Housing

Overall, there were no significant changes in living conditions noted for the participants. (For this population, stability, not necessarily improvement, can be a marker of success.) Further follow-up would be required to gauge the longer-term impact of the program on living conditions.

Housing	Entry %	6mo %
Apartment	50	50
House	17	20
Rooming house	10	7
Couch surfing	10	13
Shelter	7	3
Transitional housing	3	0
Other	3	7



I definitely felt more educated and I was happy there are a lot of options out there when it comes to budgeting, credit, loans, taxes etc. I am currently working in re: Purpose, this September I will be moving into my own apartment, attending college for the Personal Support Worker program, and am eligible for OSAP. – Audrey Hayes

Employment Rates

Although the number of youth with full-time employment dropped by the six-month mark, the number of youth employed, overall, remained consistent.

Employment	Entry %	6mo %
Full-time	33	13
None	30	37
Part-time	27	33
Other	7	3
Occasional	3	7
Volunteer	0	7



What I liked most about the program was how useful it was for my age group. Finance Matters has taught me how to manage my money accordingly, which has had a major impact in my life. I have had little to no financial worries since I have taken this program. I am proud to say I graduated debt free and I am now fully employed with an apartment of my own. – Tara Freeland

School Enrolment

Youth who kept in contact with program staff were more likely to be in school programs. At the time of the six-month follow-up, these youth remained in the program. This is a positive indicator of youth working towards completion of high school equivalency and improving stability in their lives.

School	Entry %	6mo %
No	57	57
Yes	40	43
Did not respond	3	0

Financial Setbacks

The number of youth who cited debt as a financial setback rose at the six-month mark. Perhaps this indicates a greater awareness of debt load. This is a concerning trend worthy of further study.

Current Financial Setbacks	Entry %	6mo %
Debt	57	70
Bad credit rating	43	43
Budgeting	23	30
Other	7	13



I'm now stable and able to pick up my phone without fear... I found out that my debts can be consolidated, brought together and then lowered, to make it at least manageable. I currently sit with approximately \$2400 in debt, clearing almost \$5000 off my name. It really is a hefty load off your shoulders, and without Finance Matters to show me the way I think I would be minimum \$10,000 in debt. – Anthony Canadien

Bank Accounts

There was a slight increase in the number of youth who had bank accounts at the six-month mark.

Bank Account	Entry %	6mo %
Yes	77	83
No	22	17
Did not respond	1	0

Confidence, Goal-setting, and Financial Knowledge

There was a marked increase in the knowledge base and confidence levels of the youth in the program. Overall, participants increased their positive responses to questions pertaining to financial literacy by 11% to 15% and 97% of respondents would recommend the program to others.

I am good with money	Entry %	6mo %
Strongly agree	0	14
Agree	37	41
Can't say	23	17
Disagree	33	17
Strongly disagree	7	10

I am good with numbers	Entry %	6mo %
Strongly agree	17	29
Agree	43	39
Can't say	10	21
Disagree	17	11
Strongly disagree	13	0

I am able to make a budget and plan for the future	Entry %	6mo %
Strongly agree	10	14
Agree	30	55
Can't say	27	21
Disagree	23	0
Strongly disagree	10	10

I know where to put my money in order to save and invest it	Entry %	6mo %
Strongly agree	3	17
Agree	30	45
Can't say	13	21
Disagree	33	10
Strongly disagree	20	7

I am well informed on matters that will affect my financial goals	Entry %	6mo %
Strongly agree	0	14
Agree	23	59
Can't say	17	17
Disagree	33	7
Strongly disagree	27	3

Would you recommend this program to your friends?

97% YES

When asked why they wouldn't recommend the program, the following reasons were given:

"Most of my friends don't care about finances."

"Because my friends are moochers and this program is for a certain kind of person. They wouldn't appreciate what they learned."

What is the one thing that would make this program better for other participants?

"It would be helpful to incorporate financial 'life skills'- things like how to buy cheaply at the grocery store, where to cut corners when making purchases, etc. It could replace an earlier module like Money Values (although knowing your values around money is also a helpful thing!)."

"Touching base with participants on a monthly basis to budget Ontario Works cheque." (Trainer informed participant that this was absolutely possible and will follow-up with this particular participant to budget monthly until they no longer need the support.)

"A second budgeting module that's further down the line to re-adjust budgets after they've tried (someone might give up instead of re-adjusting)."

CONCLUSION

91% of participants at Operation Come Home completed the six-week Finance Matters course. For a high-risk population known for walking away from programs that they do not find useful or engaging, this is a significant statistic. Youth indicated that they highly valued the opportunity to learn about budgeting, banking, and taxes to the extent that they reduced their use of recreational drugs, increased their involvement in education programs, reduced their use of fringe financial institutions, and recognized some of their friends as the “moochers” they are.

This being said, only 28% of participants achieved the goals they had set for themselves at the beginning of the program. The youth in the OCH Finance Matters program faced multiple issues that impacted their ability to maintain stable, healthy lives and create forward focused plans. Financial literacy is one important component of this plan which will take more than the period of this study to implement.

Youth who remained in contact with OCH staff over the six-month follow-up period, showed stable employment and education rates. There was a shift from full-time to part-time employment, but the continued engagement of youth in work and education can be seen as a move toward stability and consistency in life direction for the youth involved. In addition to completion of the Finance Matters program, five completed high school equivalency credits and two graduated from RAC, one with a General Educational Development Certificate (GED), and one with their Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC). Three youth have been accepted into post-secondary college programs.

Youth who were engaged in full-time work at the onset of the program were less likely to keep in contact with staff over the course of the evaluation, perhaps suggesting less need for continued support. Youth tend to move on from OCH programs once they no longer need support and don't typically keep in contact with staff, which makes detailed follow-up on these youth challenging.

One of the keys to the success of the OCH Finance Matters program appears to be the acceptance and flexibility of program staff to be able to respond to the individual needs of each youth. Moving forward, a continued collaborative and flexible approach to helping at-risk youth will maintain or possibly increase program effectiveness, and will enable programs to reach out to more youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research results and feedback from youth, some recommendations for program improvement are as follows.

Increase Active Learning

Youth made note of a desire for life-skills training such as learning how to food shop on a budget. One activity could be to give teams a shopping list and have them find the most and least expensive prices for everything on their list.

Finance Matters 2.0

Several participants in the program were not able to accomplish all their goals in the time allotted while others could use a refresher. Creating opportunities for these youth to continue improving their financial literacy would be of great value.

Peer Mentors

As the program continues, it would be valuable to identify peer mentors who could support new youth in the program.

Asset Matching

Other organizations have been very successful with asset-matching programs. Given available resources, this could be a valuable addition to the program.

Increased Use of Speakers

Further developing a roster of speakers who can provide youth with good insights would be a valuable addition to the program, i.e. if a majority of youth debt revolves around cell phone plans, having a consumer advocate present would be of value.

Adjustments to Outcome Evaluation

Given the transient nature of this population, three- and six-month follow-up with a small percentage of participants does not provide accurate statistical information, which could be misinterpreted. It is suggested that OCH staff explore ways to increase participation in the six-month survey and/or explore other ways to measure the long-term impacts of this program.

Track Other Financial Indicators

Through the Finance Matters process, youth may improve their financial position by accessing grants, student loans, tax rebates, etc. It would be valuable to track these indicators in order to show Return on Investment for the program.

APPENDIX

Evaluation Methodology

The tools used in this evaluation included four surveys, which were administered by the OCH Finance Matters staff. Program participants were approached as they entered the program, as they exited the program, and again at three-month and six-month follow-up periods. The surveys were open to all youth who enrolled in the Finance Matters program at OCH. A brief literature review was also conducted, and notes from OCH Finance Matters staff were reviewed and used in this report.

Key factors that Measuredoutcome.org was asked to examine include:

- The impact of financial literacy training of participants' housing, job, and education stability
- The number of youth served by counselling/intervention during the survey time period
- Whether youth are making more informed financial decisions after taking the course

Measuredoutcome.org worked directly with the OCH Finance Matters staff in the creation and development of the survey evaluation tools. All participants in the surveys were tracked using a unique intake code that ensured anonymity for each of the youth. Participation in the survey was voluntary for the youth.

There were 80 program participants over the first two years of the program, 75 of whom participated in the evaluation. In total, 75 entry surveys were completed, and 68 exit surveys were completed, with two youth who chose to opt out of the evaluation, and four who had lost contact with the program staff. 51 youth completed the three-month surveys, eight youth opted out, and 12 youth had lost contact with staff. The final six-month surveys saw 30 total respondents, with seven youth who opted out, and 38 youth who had lost contact with program staff.

	Participants	Opt Out	Lost Contact	Total
Entry Survey	75	0	0	75
Exit Survey	74	2	4	68
3 mo Survey	71	8	12	51
6 mo Survey	75	7	38	30

Entry Survey

An online survey was launched in January of 2012 for the first of nine cohorts of the Finance Matters program.

The purpose of this survey was to collect basic intake data to build a profile of the program participants. This survey also gathered information on the youth's educational, housing, employment, and financial situations, as well as goals that they had set out to accomplish at the onset of the training program and any setbacks.

Exit Survey

A second survey was also launched in January 2012 for youth to complete as they exited the program.

This survey focused on continuing to track the thoughts, accomplishments, and experiences of each participant as they exited the program.

Three- and Six-Month Follow-Up Surveys

Finance Matters staff followed up with participants three months and six months after they had completed the course.

These surveys were structured to capture each participant's experience with the program, as well as thoughts about their education, housing, and employment situations and sense of self, their emotional well-being, and their financial goals. Surveys were created using a strength-based, positive approach to all questions.

These surveys were voluntary and youth were given the option to opt out if they did not wish to participate.

Complementary Research Review

Research conducted on similar school-based programs, as well as recent research by larger addictions and mental health agencies were reviewed and are cited in this report. Morag McAleese and Jamie Hammond conducted a Literature Review, which serves as a complementary document to this report.

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