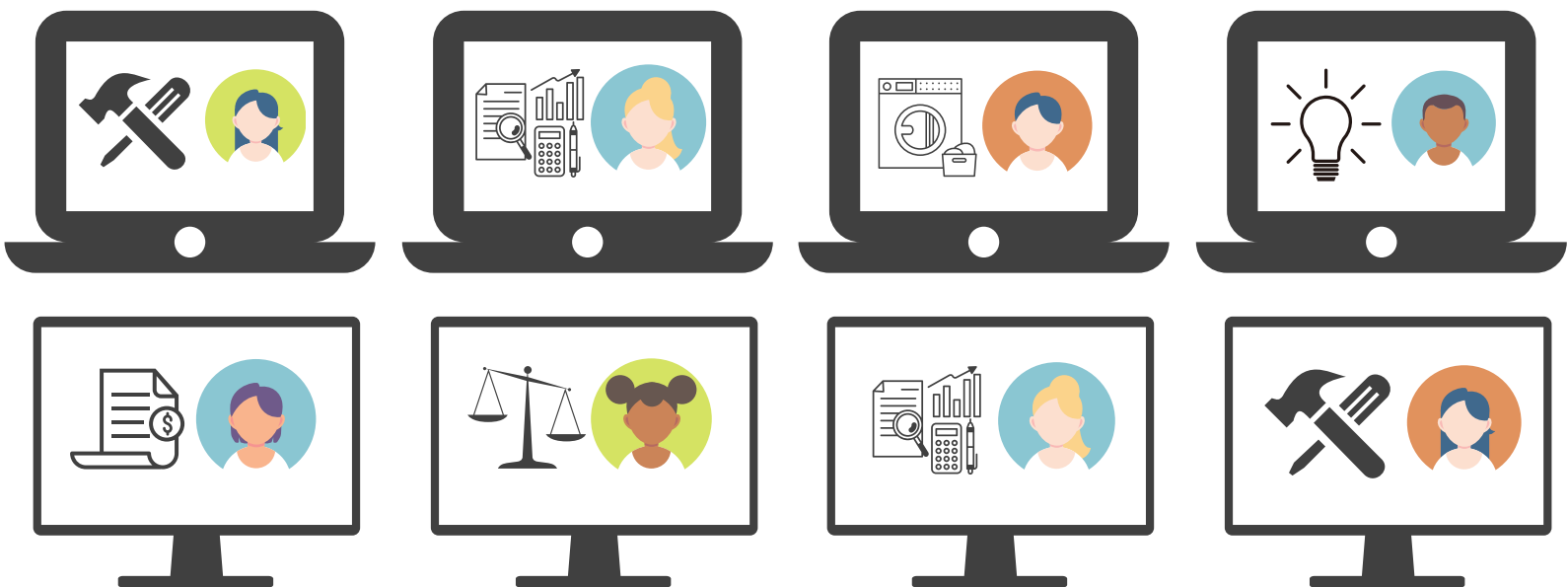# Community Ideas Factory:
The Life Skills Project

Research Highlights

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TERRITORIES

Sheridan would like to acknowledge that all of its campuses reside on land that for thousands of years before us was the traditional Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations, Anishinaabe Nation, Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. It is our collective responsibility to honour and respect those who have gone before us, those who are here, and those who have yet to come. We are grateful for the opportunity to be working on this land.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

NSERC CRSNG

Big Brothers Big Sisters OF HALTON AND HAMILTON

Bridging the GAP

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF HALTON

Food for Life

oakville community foundation

Halton Women's Place
Healthy Relationships • Healthy Communities

HMC Connections

Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre

KSM Kerr Street Mission
Oakville's Mission of Hope

This is the third Community Ideas Factory initiative – 'The Life Skills project', a collaborative social innovation research project that originated at Sheridan College and is funded through the College and Community Social Innovation Fund, which is managed by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) in collaboration with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This is a 3-year research project which proposed an innovative response to the need for effective life skills programming. This social innovation is a comprehensive, lived-experience and EDI-informed, life skills program that includes several key topic areas (modules) and associated interactive applications which allows the learner to practice the skills being taught in a virtual setting to prevent homelessness. The project resulted in a virtual Learning Management System (LMS).

The original *Community Ideas Factory* was a CCSIF-funded project co-led by Dr. Michael McNamara and Dr. Sara Cumming. The Life Skills project used the same methodological approach that applies creative problem solving (CPS) and community-engaged research to generate solutions to community challenges along with inclusive design, human-centered design, and design thinking.

CORE PROJECT TEAM

Project Director/Principal Investigator
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Jean Sanchez Salazar
Caitlin Hastings
Sarfaraz Shahzad
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Lucas Morgani
Zara Irshad

CIS Facilitators

Sessions 1 & 2

Eva J Shabitai
Dana Mazahreh
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Salwa Zahra
Alicia Mok
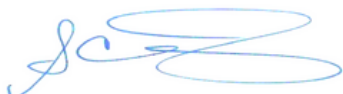Shavari Amin
Maggie Lam
Paola Di Barbora

A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

The Community Ideas Factory (CIF) is an innovative partnership between community, college, and private sectors aimed at nurturing innovation in the Social Economy. It links the College's talent, facilities, networks, resources, and capabilities with the needs of non-profit organizations in the Halton Region and surrounding areas. Since its establishment in 2016, CIF has collaborated with over 50 non-profit agencies, numerous private sector entities, and hundreds of stakeholders and Sheridan students. Together, we undertake applied research projects covering various topics such as affordable housing, food security, and employment equity, particularly focusing on challenges exacerbated by COVID-19. The outcomes of CIF's endeavors span from developing new agency programs to producing policy reports, generating data-driven insights, upgrading agency websites, and contributing to academic publications and conference papers.

For individuals deeply engaged in social justice endeavors, CIF stands as a truly collaborative partner, harnessing technologies, resources, and expertise to bolster endeavors for meaningful societal change. The Life Skills Project, its third iteration, underscores the remarkable achievements possible through these collaborative efforts.

The Life Skills Project epitomizes community engaged research as it integrates the expertise and perspectives of both academic researchers and community members. Our community of not-for-profits actively participated and collaborated throughout all stages of the research process, from identifying research questions to disseminating findings and implementing solutions. This approach ensures that this research is relevant, responsive, and impactful, addressing real-world issues and benefiting the community directly.

We hope that the outcomes of this project are just the beginning of ongoing collaborations within this network of homelessness and housing providers, and that the Life Skills Project continues to be responsive over time.

Dr. Sara Cumming, PhD

Leah Burton, MSW; Salwa Zahra and Sharvari Amin (Involved in Year 2 as CPS Facilitators); Dr. Sara Cumming (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Brandon McFarlane (Co-investigator)

PROJECT TIMELINE

Each year the project focused on a different element, beginning with the project completing foundational *Research*, then engaging in intentional and accessible *Design.* The last phase focused on *Disseminating and Evaluating* the full program in partnership with project partners.

Year One: Research

- Research design, collection, and analysis
- Develop and distribute surveys informed by conducted Collaborative Ideation Sessions to determine life skills
- Thematically analyze community responses
- Establish themes as learning modules and sub modules

Year Two: Design

- Innovation development
- Build applications and create content
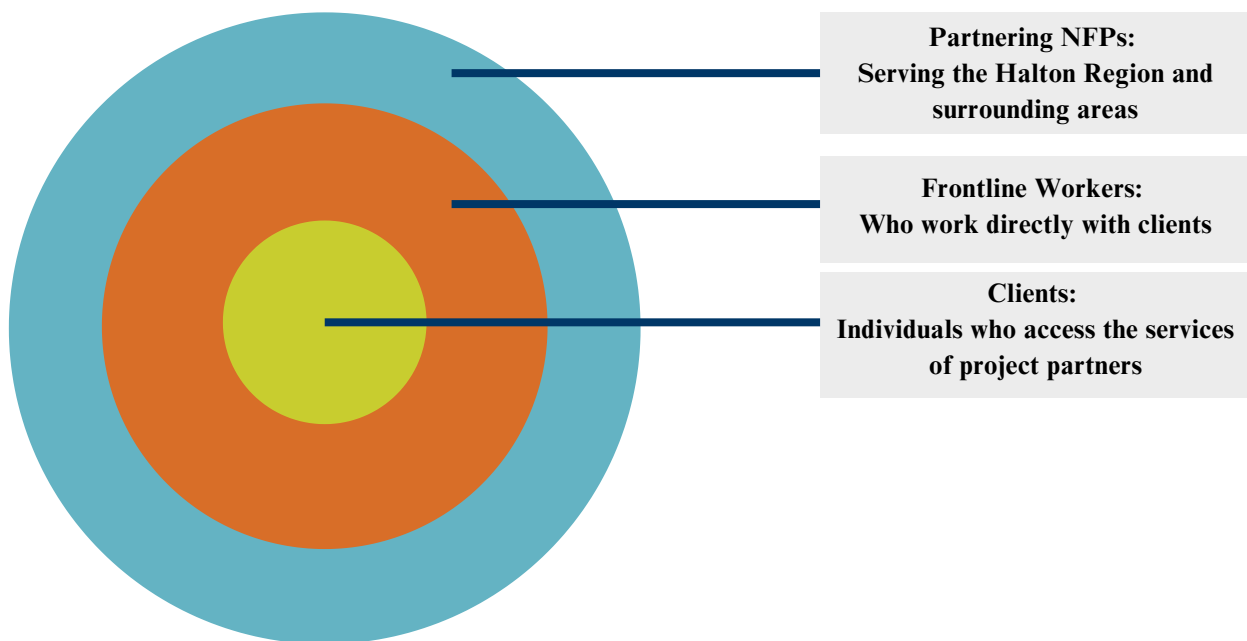- Develop pre/post tests

Year Three: Dissemination and Evaluation

- Share and implement curriculum with shared partners and stakeholders
- PAC to test and approve Learning Management System
- Clients test modules and evaluate module effectiveness
- Share learnings, findings, and knowledge

Client Centric and Community Driven

The project employed a Client-Centric and Community Driven approach that provided full participation in the project for community partners, clients and frontline workers to bring the diverse and intersecting experience, perspectives and needs of clients to the centre of attention. A Program Advisory Committee (PAC) with representatives from each partner organization was established to guide all phases of the project, from the start of research to the end. Ultimately, the final life skills learning modules and sub-modules were determined by community members for the community.

Partnering NFPs:
Serving the Halton Region and surrounding areas

Frontline Workers:
Who work directly with clients

Clients:
Individuals who access the services of project partners

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Informed

As a community-engaged research project, the use of an EDI lens was imperative for the team to implement in practice to encourage the collection of diverse perspectives and lived experiences. EDI informed project areas were included in areas such as the sampling approach, the demographic and other types of questions that were asked. Project participants represented diverse perspectives and lived experiences across multiple dimensions such as housing status, gender, ability, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and religion.

EDI PRACTICES

Critical Attentiveness to Participant Demographics	• Age • Gender • Sexuality • Race/Ethnicity • Religion • Disability	• Parent Status • Country of Birth • Refugee Status • Experience of homelessness
Types of Questions asked on the Survey	• A range of circumstances were represented in closed-ended questions • Open-ended questions after every section; opportunities for participants share experiences, perspective and needs not captured by closed-ended questions • Open-ended questions asking about barriers • Open-ended questions asking about which Life Skills are most relevant given intersecting identities and experiences	
EDI Program Advisory Committee	• A project advisory committee was set up that reviewed material as it was developed	

Over the first year of the project, the team focused on gathering the preliminary data and research. The project used a triangulation methodological research approach by way of collecting data from a variety of sources and methods. This began with completing an environmental scan.

Literature Review

At least 235,000 people experience homelessness in Canada each year, with over 35,000 experiencing homelessness on any given night (Gaetz et al. 2013a). For many, maintaining housing is challenging due to the absence of essential life skills. Many of these individuals have access to housing but struggle to maintain their housed status due to a lack of life skills, rather than a lack of income (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [COH] 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as the "ability to be adaptive and create positive behavior that enables individuals to be effective with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (Prajapati et al. 2016).

In 2014, the Halton Region (located in Ontario, Canada) incorporated a Housing First approach to their homelessness strategy. 'Housing First' is a recovery-oriented approach that centers on rapid responses to homelessness, where people experiencing homelessness are quickly moved into independent and permanent housing and are then provided additional support and services as needed (COH 2021). One of the core principles of Housing First models is that once housing is obtained, supports such as life skills training are necessary to prevent subsequent bouts of homelessness. Teaching life skills is an effective tool for increasing an individual's quality of life and is a necessity for creating a positive future for both youth and adults alike (Bazrafshan et al. 2020). The Region partners with community organizations that provide housing and support with the intended outcome of reducing homelessness. However, local NFPs have experienced concurrent difficulties incorporating effective life skills into programming, such as:

1	**The life skills categories are not informed by an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens**
2	**It has historically been taught in-person, in-group settings, which had been halted during the pandemic**
3	**They are expensive to run and all local NFPs compete for the same funding and philanthropic foundations, which has been severely restricted due to the pandemic and inflation**
4	**While NFPs understand the importance of running evidence-based programming, they rarely have the capacity or resources to carry out research or development, implementation, and evaluation.**

For individuals who experience housing precarity, life skills are an essential tool needed to achieve long-term housing stability and facilitate meaningful community connections. The significance of this programming is reflected in the fact that life skills workshops are a typical feature of NFP programming (Gaetz et al. 2013b).

Gaetz et al. (2016) identify three broad factors that cause homelessness: structural factors, system failures, and individual factors. As an intervention, life skills programming attends to the level of the individual, providing opportunities to develop practical skills and knowledge relevant to circumstances linked to homelessness,
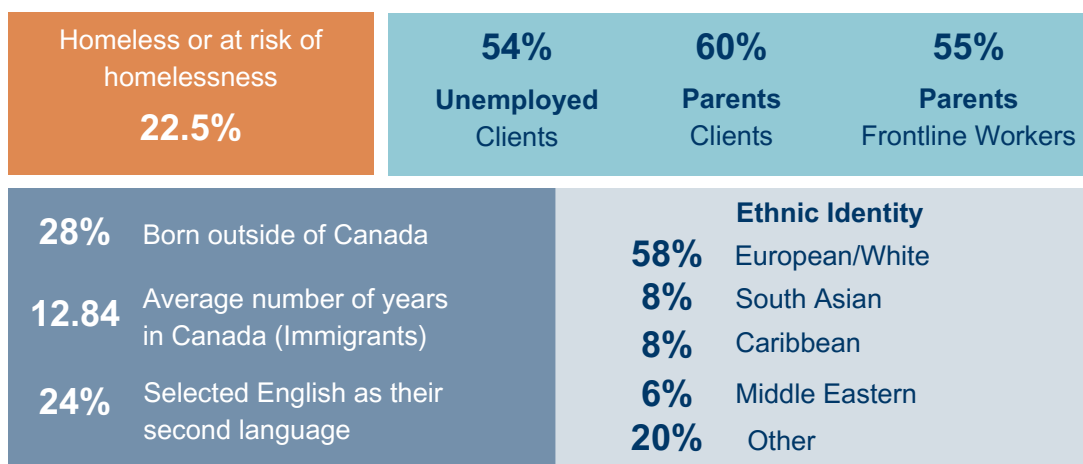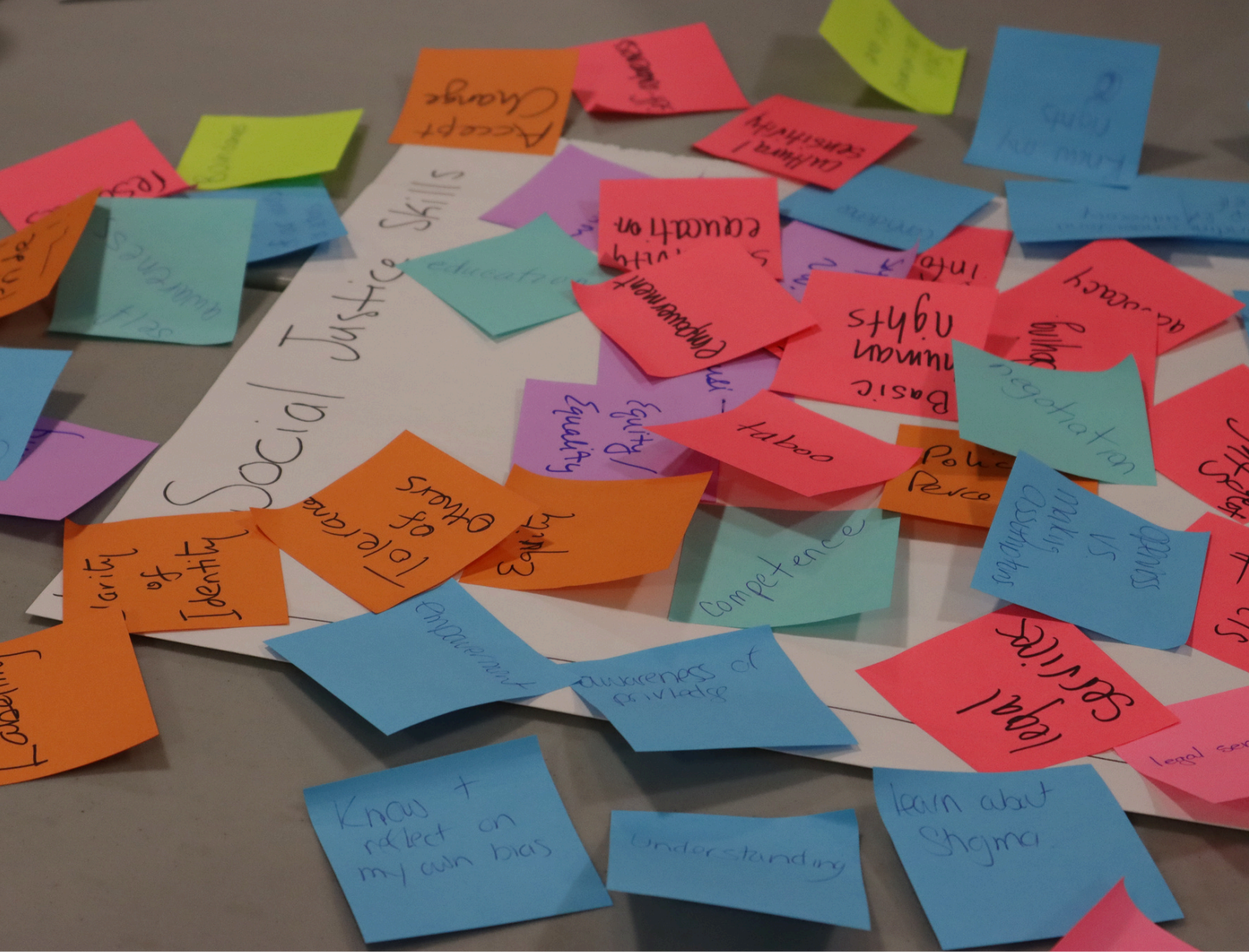
such as mental health, addiction, loss of employment, personal crisis, and relational issues (Gaetz et al. 2016). For instance, acquiring life skills and understanding the complexity of emotions can have positive impacts on mental health and well-being (Cameron et al. 2018, p. 431). Skills interventions can improve emotional regulation and resilience (Cameron et al. 2018, p. 431) and can reduce participation in risk behaviours (Moulier et al. 2019, p. 9). Those with developed foundational competencies are thus better able to skillfully navigate obstacles as they arise. Having life skills provides one set of foundational tools to empower individuals to potentially improve their entire life. This project thus sought to build a comprehensive client informed life skills curriculum that is grounded in the specific needs of the community and have the potential to increase accessibility to community organizations and service users, and support in reducing homelessness.

Participant and Research Methods

As a community-engaged research project, EDI practice is a foundational principle. This shaped the entire project, including the sampling approach, the types of survey questions (i.e., ensuring a range of experiences were represented such as knowing how to manage menstrual cycle symptoms, accessing culturally relevant mental health services, and cultural fluency). Demographic information was also collected to further ensure diverse representation. By considering intersectionality, like social location and personal experience, a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances and needs of clients could be captured in the survey responses. Client and frontline worker participants represented diverse perspectives and lived experiences across multiple dimensions, such as ability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and religion, among other variables.

Homeless or at risk of homelessness **22.5%**	**54%** **Unemployed** Clients	**60%** **Parents** Clients	**55%** **Parents** Frontline Workers

		Ethnic Identity	
28% Born outside of Canada		**58%** European/White	
12.84 Average number of years in Canada (Immigrants)		**8%** South Asian	
		8% Caribbean	
24% Selected English as their second language		**6%** Middle Eastern	
		20% Other	

In alignment with the projects research approach, two research methods were used to collect data – collaborative ideation sessions and surveys.

Collaborative Ideation Sessions

The research team hosted two Collaborative Ideation Sessions (CIS) to illicit creative thinking and solutions. Participants represented various roles within partner organizations including front line workers, managers, and executive directors.

CIS Session 1 was a virtual focus group where the creative problem solving was employed to identifying what workers perceived as the missing life skills of their client, finding the answer to the question: "What are essential life skills for clients?". With the new learnings from the first session and survey results, CIS Session 2 consisted of two sessions, virtual and in-person, to answer the question: "What sub-modules should each learning module include?"

Surveys

In addition to the two CIS, two surveys were distributed. The first was administered to frontline workers, while the other was administered to the clients of these organizations. Participants of both surveys were asked a series of ranking and open- and closed-ended questions. The objective of the surveys were to capture the unique insights from both groups and determine which life skills were most needed, which were of the most value, and what effective learning and accessibility strategies could be built into the online learning modules.

Sheridan
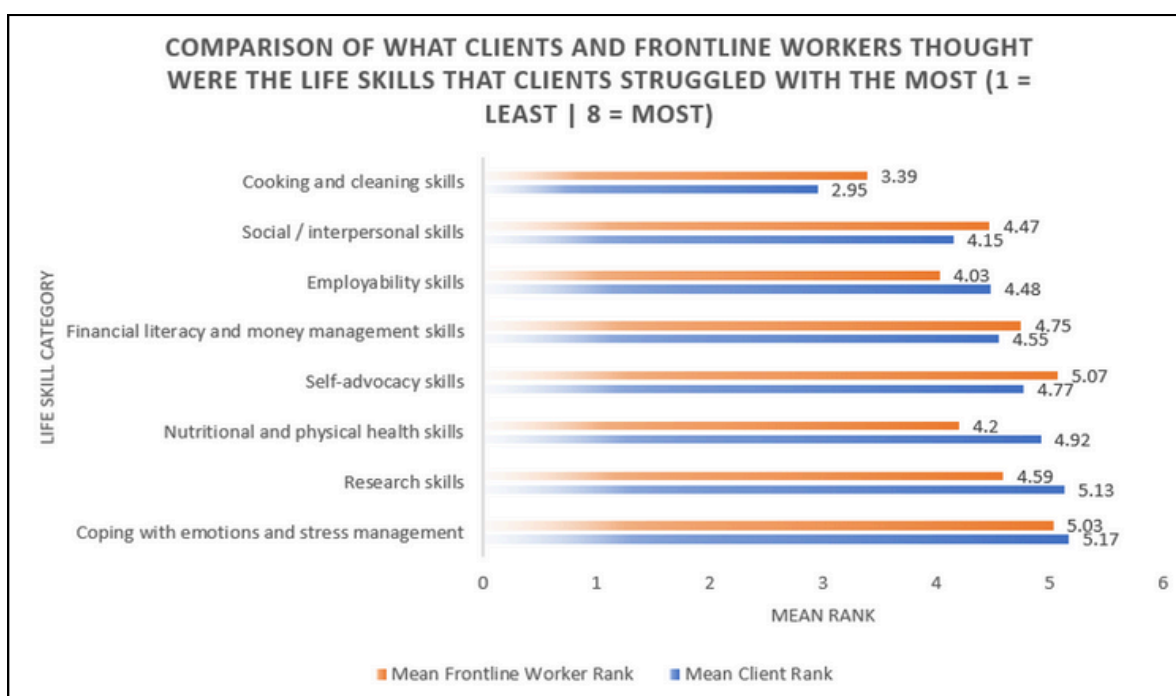
Community Ideas Factory: The Life Skills Project

Collaborative Ideation Session #2

June 1, 2022

Findings: Themes and Sub-Themes

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the CIS data and the qualitative survey data. Thematic analysis is a foundational method of analysis in qualitative research that involves identifying and describing patterns in the data and organizing them into themes (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). Using this method, the team was able to get a clear picture of the life skills that project partners believed were vital.

COMPARISON OF WHAT CLIENTS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS THOUGHT WERE THE LIFE SKILLS THAT CLIENTS STRUGGLED WITH THE MOST (1 = LEAST | 8 = MOST)

| Life Skill Category	Mean Frontline Worker Rank	Mean Client Rank
Cooking and cleaning skills	3.39	2.95
Social / interpersonal skills	4.47	4.15
Employability skills	4.03	4.48
Financial literacy and money management skills	4.75	4.55
Self-advocacy skills	5.07	4.77
Nutritional and physical health skills	4.2	4.92
Research skills	4.59	5.13
Coping with emotions and stress management	5.03	5.17

In conclusion, ten final life skills themes along several sub-themes were identified. While the data was consistent with established CIS sub-themes, several new sub-themes also emerged. In addition, during the survey distribution, participants' responses drew our attention to a new theme, not identified in the CIS analysis — social justice skills. Clients expressed a desire to learn about equity, diversity, and inclusive practices, such as understanding the context of social justice issues and how to ask for gender pronouns.

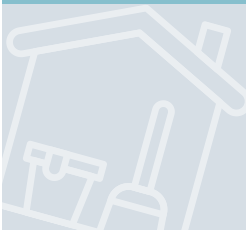## Findings: Themes and Sub-Themes

Financial Literacy
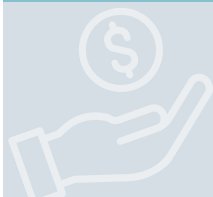
Sub-themes: Financial Literacy, Budgeting, Financial Planning and Saving, Credit and Credit Scores, Paying Bills and Consumer Awareness

Interpersonal Skills

Sub-themes: Social Skills, Communication Skills,Collaboration Skills, Leadership Skills, Self-Advocacy Skills, Relationship Skills, Conflict Resolution Skills, Presentation of Self, Negotiation Skills and Parenting Skills

Household Management Skills

Sub-themes: Household Management and Knowledge, Managing a Household Budget, Cooking and Shopping Skills

Personal Skills

Sub-themes: Health and Wellness, Mental Health Practices (Including Self-Care),Self Understanding, Awareness and Reflection, Crisis Management and Emotional Regulation, Mindset, Hygiene, Sex Education and Family Planning

Skills for Success

Sub-themes: Goal Setting and Planning, Organization, Literacy Skills (Numeracy, Reading, Writing, Computer/Tech), Time Management, Foundational Skills (e.g. work ethic, accountability, reliability etc.), Understanding Canadian Culture

Critical Thinking and Research Skills

Sub-themes: Decision-making, Problem-solving, Critical Thinking, Research Skills

Resourcefulness Skills

Sub-themes: Readiness for service engagement (i.e. motivation, willingness to take action), Finding and accessing community resources (i.e. food, mental health and addictions support, legal support etc.), Creative problem-solving, Navigating systems and services

Employment Skills

Sub-themes: Accessing education, Employment Skills, Employment and Income, Professional Relationship Building

Housing Research Skills and Knowledge

Sub-themes: Housing knowledge and awareness, Landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, Accessing community resources related to housing

Social Justice Skills

Sub-themes: Self-awareness, Cultural competency, Empowerment and Self-advocacy, Systemic issues, Relationship dynamics at the workplace

Over the second year of the project, the team focused on the design of the life skills modules, including content development, learner applications, and resource building. Project partners shared their resources and workshop materials to inform learning outcomes and present applicable resources for learners who will access the LMS. Research Assistants and Interactive Design Interns took to building out the life skills modules under the guidance of the preliminary research of the project, but also the Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Program Advisory Committee.

Curriculum Development

Each theme, along with correlating sub-themes, were assigned learning outcomes that were informed by key focus areas identified in the survey data. With the support of project partners and research assistants funded through Sheridan's work study program, a learning curriculum was developed for each of the modules, each corresponding to the identified learning outcomes.

YEAR TWO: DESIGN

Learning Outcomes: Financial Skills & Knowledge

Financial Literacy	Ability To: 1) Define Financial Literacy 2) Distinguish between different types of banking options 3) Understand how to open a bank account; including how to get a secure ID 4) Identify healthy vs unhealthy spending habits 5) Understand the tax process (i.e., how to file taxes, ramifications of taxes are not filed, and benefits of filing your taxes)	6) Identify income options (Employment income, OSAP, OW, EI, ODSP) and how to create multiple streams of income 7) Utilize basic math skills 8) Ability to understand and navigate the CRA website
Budgeting	Ability To: 1) Define and understand fixed and variable expenses 2) Calculate income and outgoing expenses 3) Determine wants versus needs (prioritize expenses) 4) Write out or create a budget (i.e., by hand, on excel or on other platforms) and maintain and follow through with that budget, including creating a realistic budget 5) Set goals in budgeting; including budgeting for short term and long term goals	6) Identify why budgeting is important (Buy in), how to track expenses and identify when one goes over budget 7) Stretch a dollar further (i.e., accessing community resources) 8) Understand overdraft and options to get out of overdraft 9) Understand and utilize online and in-person banking 10) Utilize money jar system
Credit & Credit Scores	Ability To: 1) Define 'Credit' and 'Credit Score' 2) Understand why credit is important and how to check one's credit, and to understand the impact of doing so 3) Understand interest rates, the 'minimum payment process' and the 'risks and rewards' of having a credit card 4) Determine credit card needs and suitability, and understand how one builds credit	5) Understand what good credit is and why it is needed 6) Define and understand 'debt' 7) Determine best courses of action to handle debt 8) Understand collection agencies - what are they? How do they affect my credit? 9) Understand the borrowing and repayment process - what happens to unpaid loans? 10) Understand what negatively impacts one's credit; factors that affect credit
Financial Planning & Saving	Ability To: 1) Learn strategies for saving 2) Set financial goals and plan/ save for the future 3) Understand how poor spending habits now will impact the future (long-term and critical thinking) 4) Understand savings accounts and investments (i.e., regular saving account, TFSA, RESP, RRSP)	
Paying Bills	Ability To: 1) Define and understand what a bill is 2) Understand how to pay bills; including how to stay on top of bills (organization) 3) Understand the automatic withdrawal process - how to set-up my bills to do this? 4) Understand taxes and sales tax 5) Write a cheque/ how to deposit a cheque	6) Understand arrears 7) Understand the difference between installment plans for billing and standard billing 8) Understand the impact/consequences of missing bill deadlines 9) Prioritize bills/expenses
Consumer Awareness	Ability To: 1) Understand/ have awareness of price points (i.e., how do I know an item is really on sale?) 2) Understand consumer options (i.e., name brand versus no-name brand) 3) Critically think when making financial decisions (i.e., Can I find this same product cheaper elsewhere?) 4) Understand marked price versus price after tax	

Curriculum Features and Interactive Design

Consisting of a combination of text, videos, graphics, case studies, and interactive tests and quizzes, each module aims to provide the learner with a comprehensive and enriched learning experience. Visual components along additional instructions were also included to offer accessible support and options. With available links, downloadable PDFs, and instructions, learners are also directed to supporting resources and materials, including applications forms to community programs or up to date schedules for food programs or other resources.
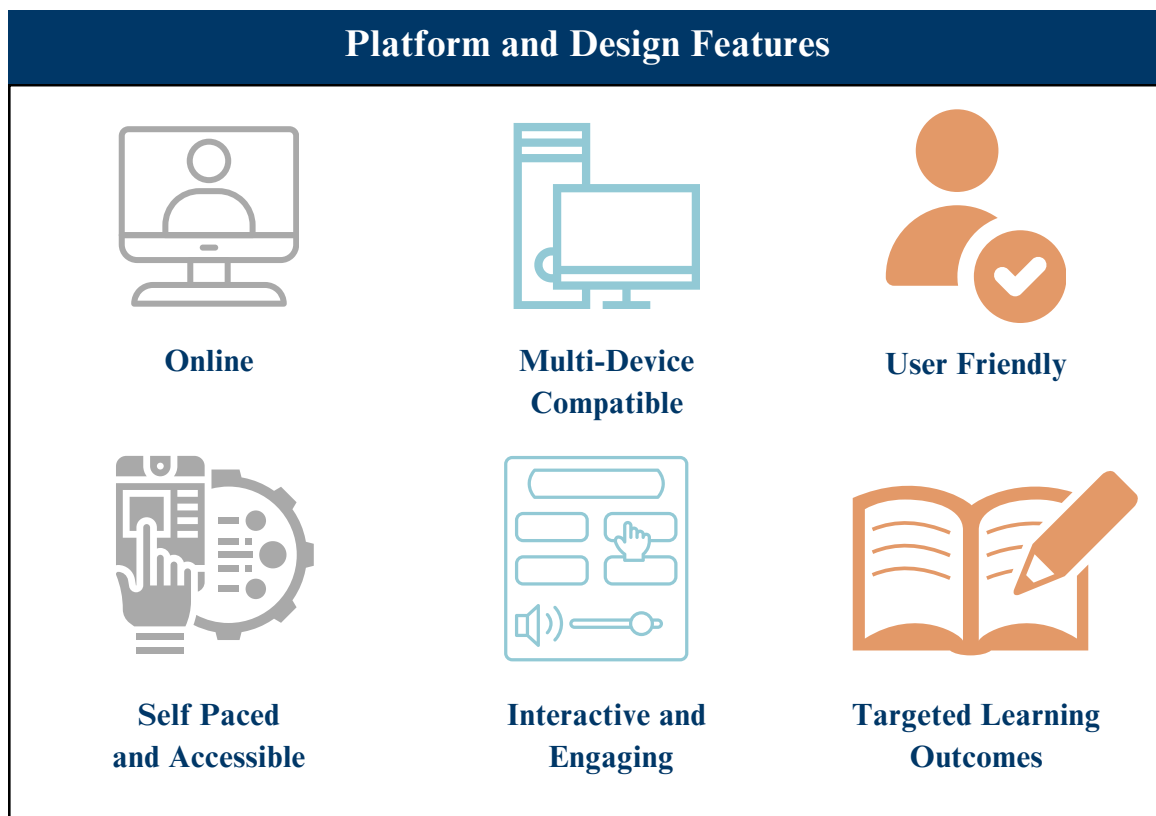
To further the design, the research team welcomed seven interactive design interns from Sheridan College, who took on the task of developing customized interactive pieces. They began their contract with the project with a tour of the community to get a real feel of their targeted audience. The tour included visiting project partner, Kerr Street Mission in Oakville, seeing their featured food program, classrooms, and program space. With a glimpse of the work being done in the community and reviewing initial research gathered in year one of the project, the team began designing and developing interactive virtual applications for the life skills modules. Each module features one of these interative applications.
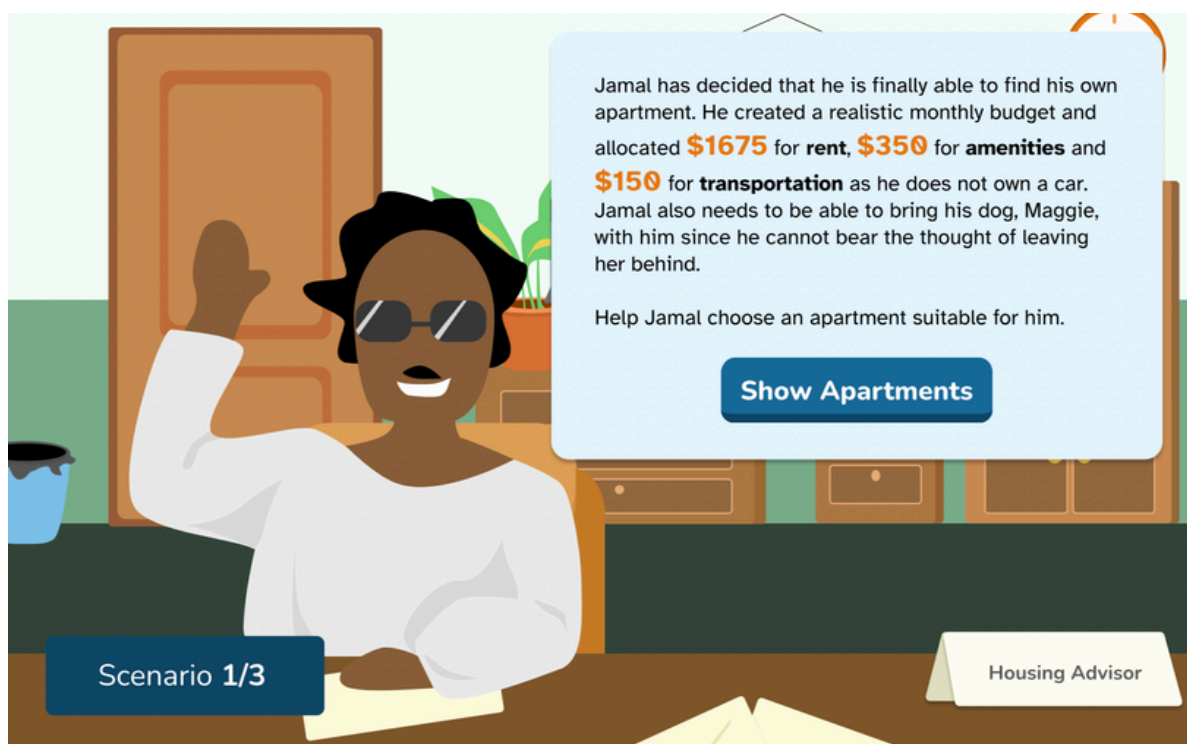
The interactive virtual applications consist of activities in the form of games, situational scenarios that learners can navigate using learned knowledge, content exploration, and virtual simulation. The PAC and community partners stayed engaged with their involvement of guiding the interactive design interns to ensure that the project is meeting any EDI or accessibility requirements before the LMS was launched.

Platform and Design Features		
Online	**Multi-Device Compatible**	**User Friendly**
Self Paced and Accessible	**Interactive and Engaging**	**Targeted Learning Outcomes**

Welcome videos were also added to each module to provide learners an overview of what they will be learning. The videos feature members of the research team along with community members of diverse backgrounds and involvement in the community.

The members featured in the video:

- Cameron Spencer, BA
- Catherine Villasenor, RSW
- Humaira Siddiqui, PhD
- Jovelle Reid, RSSW
- Julianne DiSanto, PhD
- Katelyn Zaoral

- Mark Shufflebottom
- Michael McNamara, PhD
- Nikkian Hanson-Daley, BA
- Sara Cumming, PhD
- Temisha Jacques

Financial Literacy & Knowledge

Let's Explore the 5 Budgeting Methods

Embark on an engaging Budgeting Methods Adventure where you'll explore a scenario through an informative video. **With five different budgeting methods to choose from**, you will encounter a variety of expenses and learn how Jamila would make crucial decisions on how to budget effectively.

Watch the Video

Remember Jamila? You helped her calculate her income and now she needs to budget. Watch the video to learn about her expenses. Then explore the different budget methods to see how they would help Jamila.

Financial Skills - Video 2

LifeSkills Project

Let's check back in with Jamila.

Since we've already established her monthly income, let's help her budget the money!

01:40   vimeo

Budgeting Methods

Select which budgeting method you want to explore.

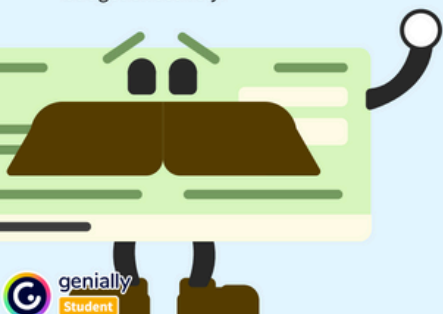| Line Item Budgeting | Zero-Based Budgeting | Cash Budgeting | 50/30/20 Rule | Pay Yourself First |

genially
Student

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Practices

To enforce the application of EDI principles, the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was brought together to offer the project further insight and feedback. Members of the EDI PAC consisted of individuals with diverse backgrounds and lived experience, including service providers, service users, and other community members. These members took the time to review content and offered feedback on how the curriculum could be more relatable and effective for the targeted audience, including adjusting examples to use realistic or relatable storylines or figures and improving content to include other cultures and representation.

Engaging Students in Research

To date, 29 students from various programs have actively participated in this research project, learning practical research skills and gaining experience working with large groups across sectors to achieve a common goal. Students have witnessed collaboration and innovation playing out in real-world settings on a project with real-world impact. Projects like these build empathy in individuals as they learn about the struggles some of their neighbours experience daily. Conversely, the students add depth to the project often bringing fresh eyes and unique perspective to the work. Sheridan's Work-Integrated-Learning (WIL) program covered the wages of these students to give them work experience—the Community Ideas Factory has been able to double the number of students due to WIL, allowing for a much more fulsome interdisciplinary outcome.

Most of the students hired on to this project asked to stay on beyond their time in their Sheridan programs. The most common unanticipated outcome was that the students commented that they learned life skills themselves during this project. Many wished that a course such as this was provided to them earlier in their lives. They also brought our attention to areas that they felt could be better developed with more attention to diversity.

YEAR THREE: DISSEMINATION AND EVALUATION

Over the third year of the project, the final stages of building the life skills curriculum into the Learning Management System was completed, allowing for the community to experience and test the finished product. The SPARK team from Sheridan College offered their expertise and skills to fine tune the curriculum and add other features to further engagement and pizzazz.

The curriculum was built on Sheridan's Open Access system, offering partners a platform that was affordable, user-friendly, and included options that allowed learners to be self directed, certificate of completions, and the bonus of added credibility being associated with a widely known college of Ontario.
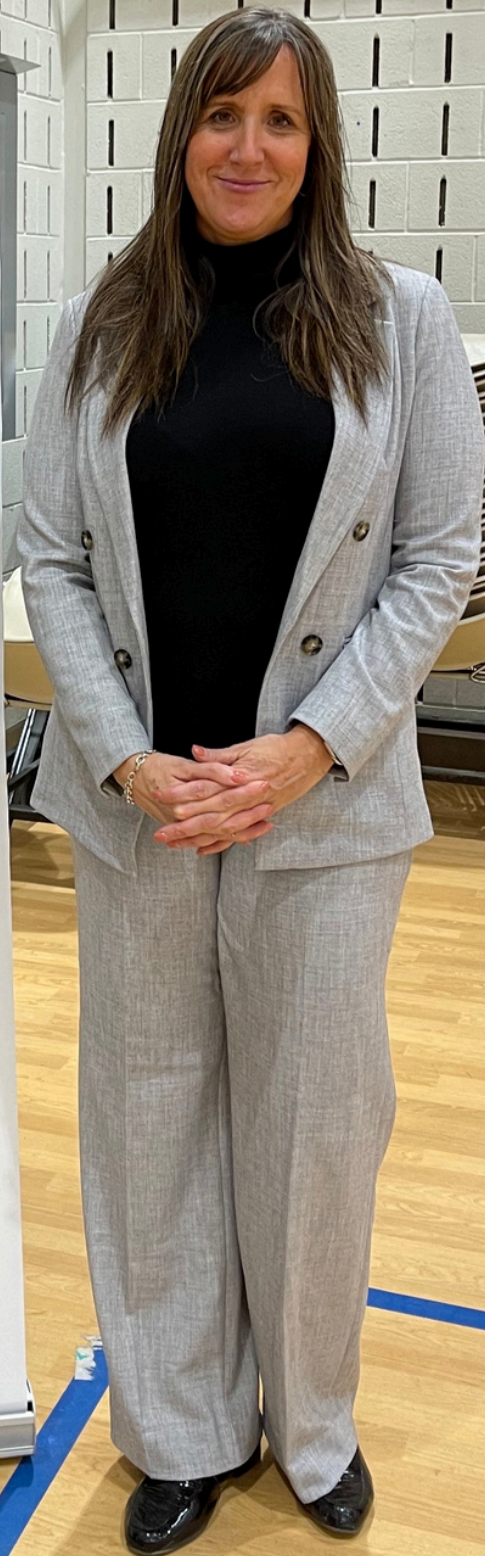
Following the completion of the modules, all the project partners were invited to celebrate the finished product. A launch party was hosted, welcoming 30 attendees, consisting of program partners and interested community members, eager to test out the LMS. Computers were set up around the room and attendees were able to experience the modules features and share their feedback.

Financial Literacy

Progress by Respondents

| Budgeting | Consumer Awareness | Paying Bills |

- Budgeting: Pre-Test 40%, Post-Test 100%
- Consumer Awareness: Pre-Test 92%, Post-Test 98%
- Paying Bills: Pre-Test 66%, Post-Test 91%

■ Pre-Test ■ Post-Test

Average Scores

Skills for Success

Progress by Respondents

- Foundational Skills: Pre-Test 55%, Post-Test 93%
- Goal Setting: Pre-Test 65%, Post-Test 93%
- Canadian Culture: Pre-Test 78%, Post-Test 90%
- Time Management: Pre-Test 78%, Post-Test 85%

■ Pre-Test ■ Post-Test

Average Scores

Critical Thinking Skills

Progress by Respondents

- Critical Thinking: Pre-Test 76%, Post-Test 83%
- Decision Making: Pre-Test 91%, Post-Test 95%

■ Pre-Test ■ Post-Test
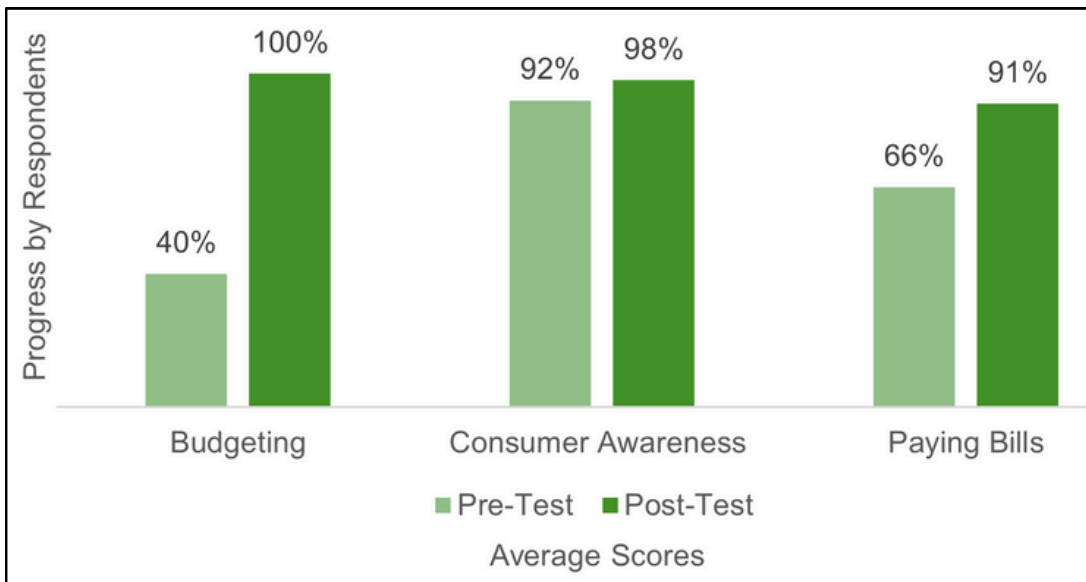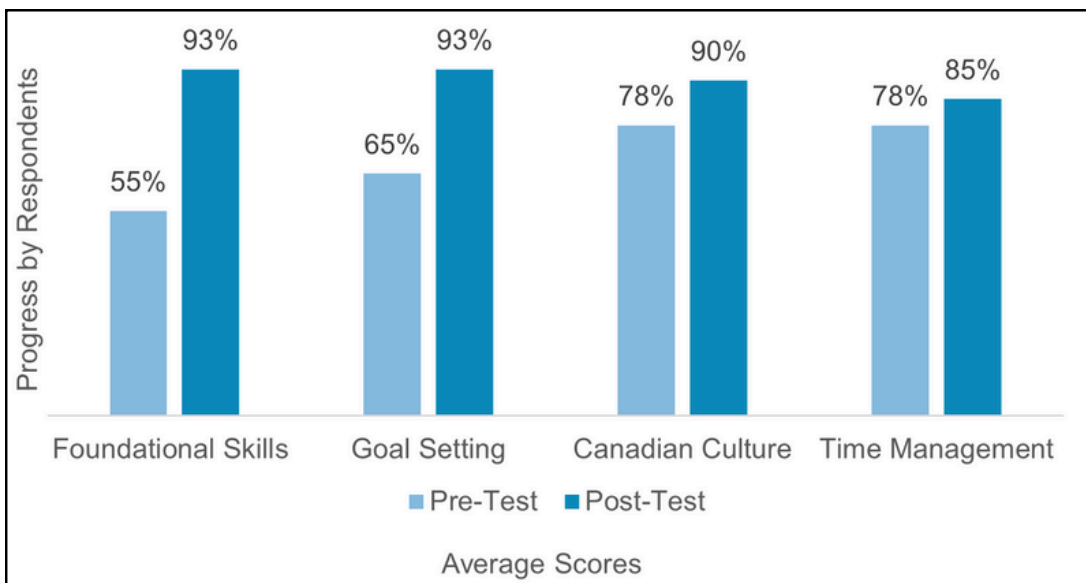
Average Scores
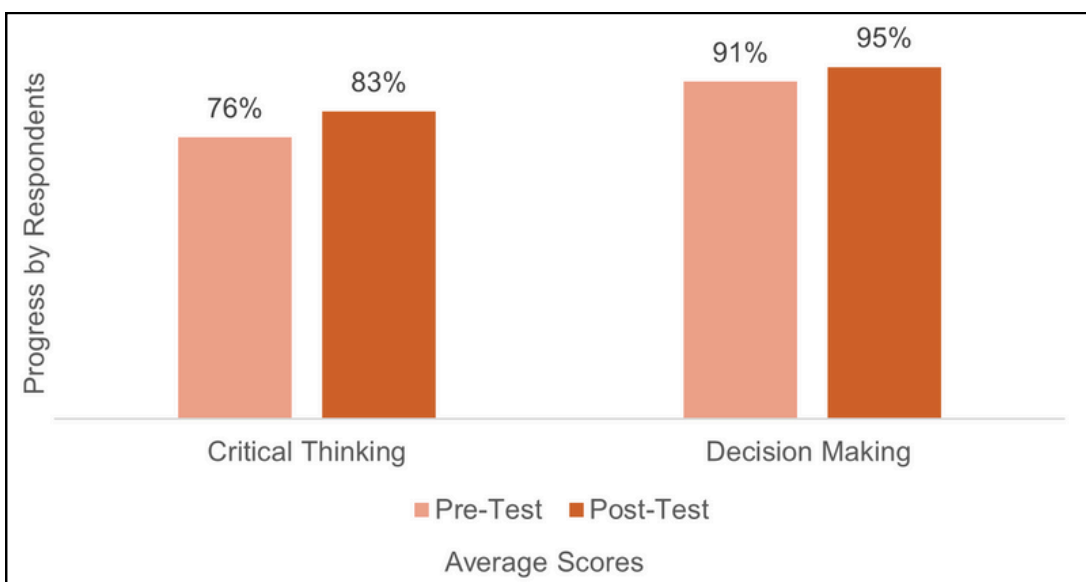
Pre and Post Test Findings

The findings presented in this study offer a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of our new life skills curriculum, drawing from comparisons of pre and post-tests among clients of our 15 not-for-profit partners. Through examination, these findings shed light on the transformative impact of our curriculum across various modules, providing valuable insights into the enhancement of participant knowledge and understanding upon completion of the full module.

Financial Literacy - In the Budgeting module, we found that 79% of respondents demonstrated increased knowledge, with the average post-test score reaching 88%, and an impressive 37% mastering the material with a perfect score of 100%. Particularly notable was one participant who made a remarkable leap from a pretest score of 40% to a perfect score on the post-test.

Skills for Success - Upon reviewing the pre and post-test scores for the Skills for Success module, significant improvements in participant knowledge across all sub-modules were observed. Particularly noteworthy were the substantial advancements in the Foundational Skills (Accountability) and Goal Setting sub-modules. A notable knowledge gain occurred in the Organization sub-module, with a participant scoring 38% on the pre-test and 100% on the post-test, while 91% of participants scored perfectly on their post-test.

Critical Thinking - The Critical Thinking Skills module comprised of four sub-modules: Critical Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, and Research Skills. Participants exhibited improvement in their pre and post-tests for each of these modules. The most significant enhancement observed in the Critical Thinking sub-module, was a participant improving from a pre-test score of 20% to a post-test score of 80%.

While participants demonstrated gains and positive impacts in these areas, there is potential for further enhancement, particularly in fostering deeper analytical abilities and logical reasoning. Addressing these areas will better equip participants with the skills necessary for navigating complex challenges and making informed decisions across various contexts.
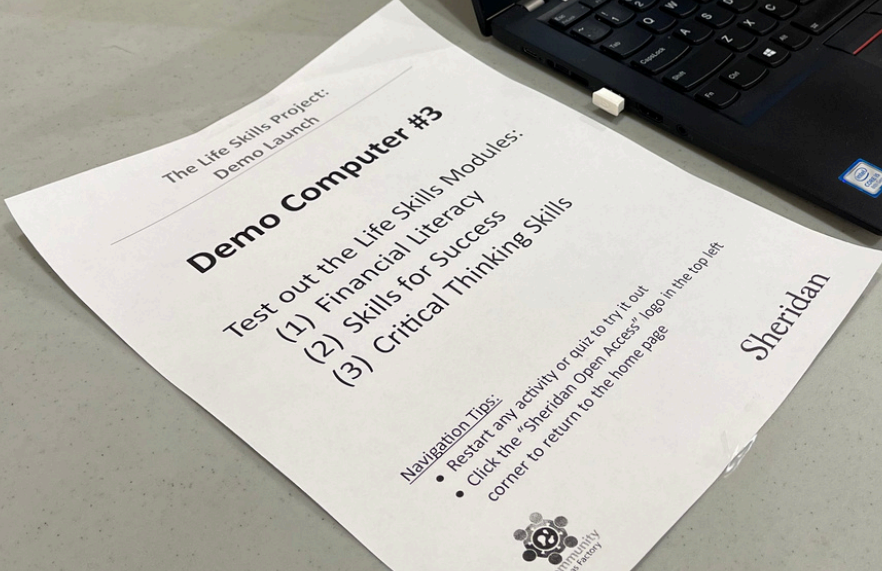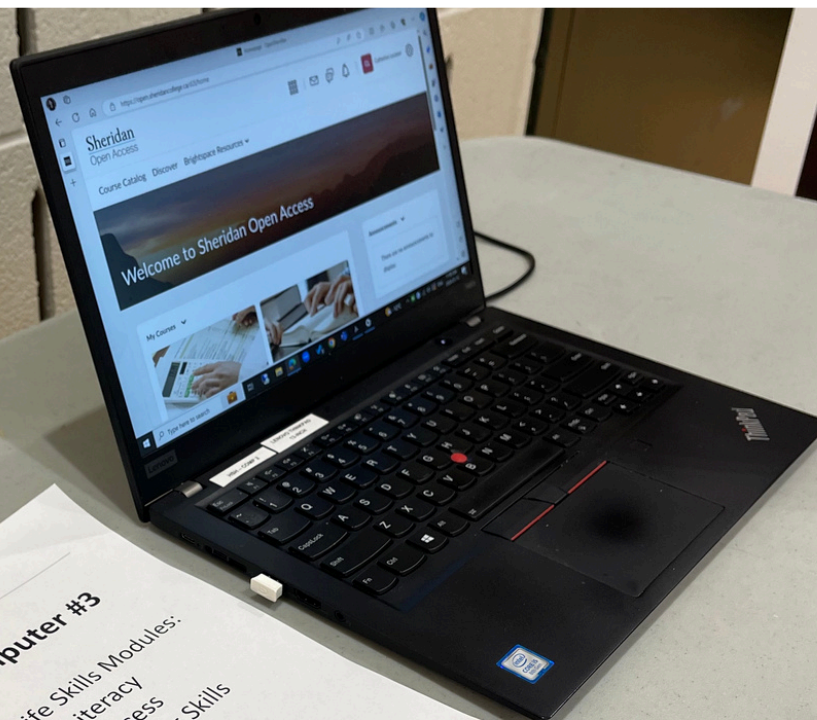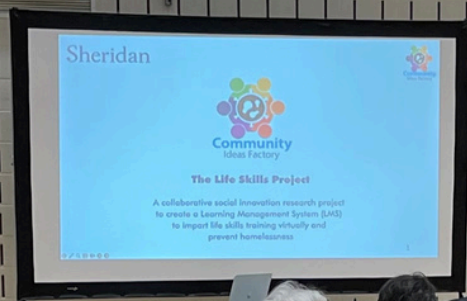
WHAT'S NEXT

The Life Skills project sought out to access the needs of individuals who are marginalized and/or precariously housed and create a virtual life skills program that is grounded in evidence-based research and specific to the needs of the community and the thousands of individuals served annually across Halton Region and surrounding areas. Life skills programming is a key component of many social service programming offered to prevent homelessness, however, after the pandemic, the programming required a reimagining of what was needed and how the programming is delivered, while remaining as cost effective as possible.

In the final year of the project, the life skills curriculum was launched amongst the 15 not-for-profit organizations that partnered with the project who have made it accessible to over 200 service users. There will be an opportunity to purchase access to the curriculum by other not-for-profits within the first year following the project end date.

The project findings and learnings have been showcased at community action tables, amongst social media sites, and presented at national and international conferences. To date, the project has already been presented in Toronto, Ontario; Louisville, Kentucky; and Melbourne, Australia; and will be presented at the Canadian Sociology Association and American Sociology Association in Montreal, Quebec.

The Importance of Continued Support

For more than two decades, the Canadian government has been funding applied research collaborations between colleges and small-and-medium enterprises. Through its College-Community Innovation (CCI) funding program, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) has actively sought to increase innovation in local economics by enabling Canadian colleges to work with local companies on projects that facilitation the adaptation and adoption of new technologies. In 2016, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) followed suit by launching the College and Community Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF). The objective of CCSIF grants is to foster social innovation by connecting the talent, facilities, resources and capabilities of Canada's colleges with the research needs of local, community-based organizations and local communities, more broadly. Since its initial launch, CCSIF grants have supported numerous academic-community projects across Canada.

The Community Ideas Factory was made possible by a grant from the CCSIF, and this project is its third-iteration of that. With each awarded CCSIF grant, we hope that we have contributed to positive social change in the Halton Region and surrounding area. We are pleased that the work accomplished through the Community Ideas Factory has offered foundational knowledge for further growth and innovation. It is our strong desire that the momentum developed through this project pushes the community to continue to further develop and build upon the learnings discovered.

In 2024, awarded funding by NSERC's Mobilize Grant will allow for further improvements to be made so the life skills modules are more accessible to newcomers. These features will be developed in partnership with Sheridan College's SPARK team and Halton Multicultural Council.

Community
Ideas Factory

GENERATOR
at Sheridan

NSERC
CRSNG