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Community Ideas Factory: The Life Skills Project Year 1 Report

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Community Ideas Factory: The Life Skills Project Year 1 Report

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Sheridan

Faculty of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Sheridan

Research



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



Dr. Sara Cumming
Principal Investigator

The third Community Ideas Factory Initiative (CIF) - The “Life Skills Project”, led by Sheridan College Professor, Dr. Sara J. Cumming was launched in July 2021. She is joined by co-investigators: Professor Dr. Julianne DiSanto, Professor Dr. Brandon McFarlane, Professor Mark Shufflebottom, Dr. Humaira Siddiqui, and Leah Burton, MSW.

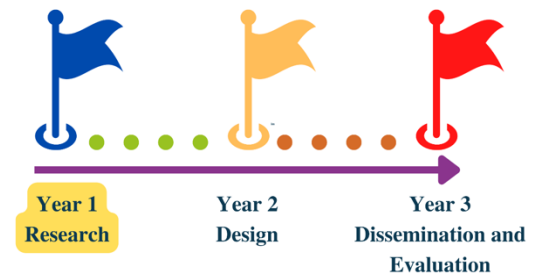
This is an NSERC/SSHRC CCSIF funded research collaboration between Sheridan College, Big Brothers Big Sisters Halton Hamilton (BBBS), Bridging the Gap (BtG), Children’s Aid Society (CAS), Food For Life (FFL), Halton Multicultural Council: Connections (HMC), Halton Women’s Place, Halton Region, Kerr Street Mission (KSM), Oakville Community Foundation (OCF), Oak Park Neighbourhood Center (OPNC), Peterborough Housing Corporation, Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services (SAVIS), Shifra, United Way Halton Hamilton (UWHH), Woodgreen, and YMCA of Oakville.

The project aims to develop quality, creative and applied virtual life skills programming that will enhance the lives of marginalized populations in Halton Region and its surrounding areas. The life skills programming will be a comprehensive, lived-experience and EDI-informed program that includes several key topics and associated interactive applications that will allow the learner to practice the essential life skills being taught in a virtual setting to prevent homelessness. The result of this project will be a virtual Learning Management System (LMS) shared across the Halton Region and beyond.

The Life Skills Project Rationale : A special [video](#) was created by Sharp Storytelling to showcase the rationale of the Life Skills Project and shared on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Project Timeline

Over the first year of the project, the team focused on gathering the preliminary data and research to establish a firm foundation for this three-year project. Using a Community Engaged Research (CER) approach the team focused on doing an environmental scan and conducting qualitative and quantitative data. In addition to the core research team, the project worked with Sheridan student facilitators, research assistants, a marketing assistant and project manager to launch the project.



Year 1 Achievements

Research Ethics Board Approval



The CIF: Life Skills Project is an approved project by the Sheridan Research Ethics Board and follows ethical conduct of research involving participants.

Triangulation Research Approach



This project uses a Triangulation methodological research approach by way of collecting data from a variety of sources and methods, including completing an environmental scan, conducting ideation sessions, having a program advisory committee, and administering surveys to both frontline workers and clients.

Creative Problem Solving

The research team engaged project partners and the community through Collaborative Ideation Sessions (CIS) to illicit creative thinking and solutions.

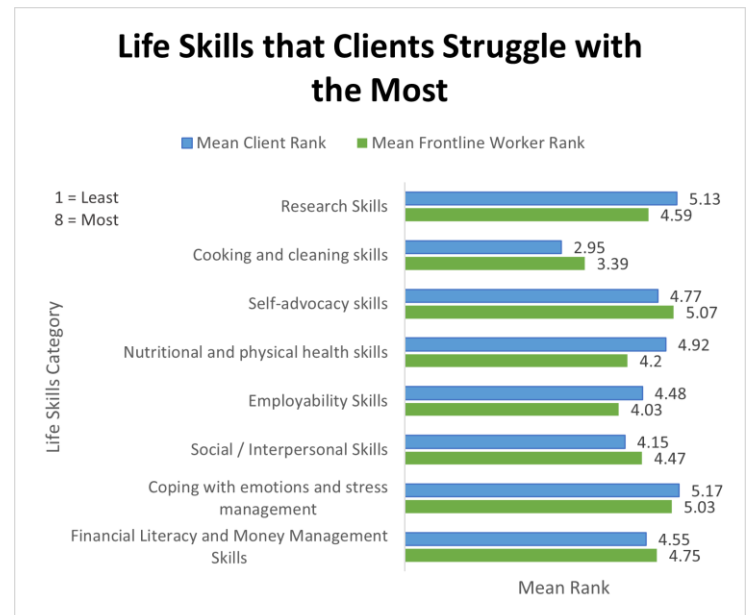
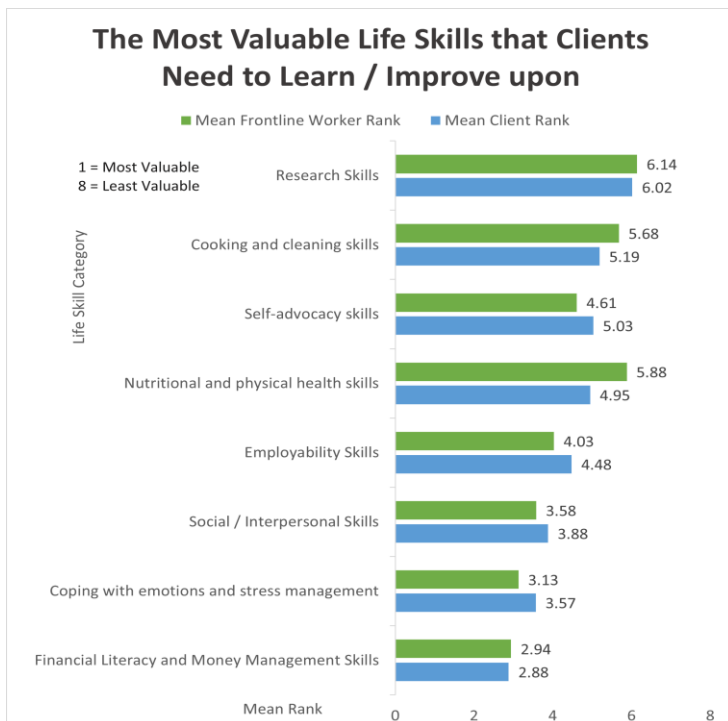
In November 2021, the first CIS was held via Zoom due to COVID restrictions to begin ideating major life skills themes and needs to inform the development of the two open-ended surveys that were distributed in the community. Twenty-two organizations across Halton Region and its surrounding area sent case workers, managers, directors and other staff to participate and share their expertise. This informed the development of the survey questions (see below).

In June 2022, upon completion of the analysis of survey data, the second CIS was held over two sessions – one online and one in-person at Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre to identify the most pertinent sub-modules and determine how to order the sub-modules based on the 10 major themes that were identified at the previous CIS. 18 organizations were represented across the two sessions, where old and new attendees were welcomed.



Surveys: Qualitative and Quantitative Research and Data

To understand the lived experiences of diverse clients and the perspectives of the frontline workers who regularly engage with them, the research team developed two distinct surveys consisting of open and closed ended questions and ranking questions that reflected the learnings from the Collaborative Ideation Session. Data collection ran from February 16 to March 4, 2022 and were completed by 97 clients and 104 frontline workers. Qualitative and Quantitative data was extracted from the surveys, offering unique insights and findings, including the emergence of a new theme.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the Life Skills Modules

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 such as the sampling approach, the demographic questions asked, and the types of questions that were asked on the survey. Project participants represented diverse perspectives and lived experiences across multiple dimensions such as housing status, gender, ability, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and religion. Below reflects some of the groups represented in the data.

Clients	Frontline Workers																																																								
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Additionally, in sharing their experiences, clients clearly voiced that the life skills modules *themselves* must be created through an EDI lens to ensure that the intersectional needs of individuals are met.

A client who self-identified as likely being on the autism spectrum noted that they have trouble interacting with people. modules on interpersonal skills require attentiveness to aspects of social interactions that are taken for granted by someone who is neurotypical.

A client shared the importance of **inclusive sex education** appropriate to the 2SLGBTQ+ community and nonbinary individuals.

A client who identified as chronically ill drew our attention to "spoon theory" and the importance of understanding **time management** from the perspective of someone who lives with chronic illness.

Findings: Life Skills Themes & Subtheme

After completing a thematic analysis, the final Life Skills themes and subthemes were identified. While the data was overwhelmingly consistent with our established CIS (sub)themes, several new **subthemes** also emerged. In addition, during the survey distribution, participants' responses drew our attention to a **new theme**, not identified in our 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.



Financial Skills & Knowledge

Sub-themes: financial literacy, budgeting, financial planning and saving, credit & credit scores, paying bills, 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, 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 (incl. self-care), self-understanding, awareness and reflection, crisis management and emotional regulation, mindset, hygiene, sex education, family planning.



Skills for Success

Sub-themes: goal setting and planning, organization, literacy skills (numeracy; reading and writing; technological/computer), time management, foundational skills (e.g. work ethic, accountability, reliability, etc.), understanding Canadian culture.



Critical thinking & 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., accessing 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 & Knowledge

Sub-themes: housing knowledge & awareness, landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, accessing community resources related to housing.



Social Justice Skills

Sub-theme: self-awareness, cultural competency, empowerment & self-advocacy, systemic issues, relationships dynamics of the workplace.

Next Steps:



Moving forward, year two of this project will focus on content sharing, as well as creation and learning management system design. We will focus our efforts as a research team on gathering, consolidating and developing the material for the above described life skills modules. Once the content is shared and determined, module creation and design will take place, to ensure the applied nature of learning is available on the Learning Management System (LMS).

The research team will work with the community partners to build a client centric EDI focused Project Advisory Committee. This committee will be made up of individuals with diverse lived experiences who will help review each of the learning modules to ensure that their diverse learning styles and experiences are reflected in each module.

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