

Employment Navigator Pilot Project Final Report: Pathways to Employment

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Executive Summary

The implementation and evaluation of the Employment Navigator Project (ENP) was an exciting and unique opportunity for practitioners, policy-makers and evaluators to explore how best to support long-term unemployed individuals with multiple barriers to move into (or closer to) employment.

The ENP model that was implemented incorporated best practice approaches to deliver employment supports to tenants in supportive housing, tenants who might otherwise have not considered employment as a viable option for themselves.

ENP was a three-year project funded by the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's Community and Employer Partnerships Research and Innovation Program. One-time funding was awarded to the BC Centre for Employment Excellence (CfEE) to develop and evaluate ENP. CfEE collaborated with the Lookout Health and Housing Society (LO) and Open Door Group (ODG) who jointly delivered the employment navigator services.

The ENP model incorporated extensive outreach with a place-based approach, which meant tenants could access ENP supports close to where they lived. The model was client-focused and provided holistic, tailored supports to participants. These supports were not time limited and continued after participants were placed in employment, training or a community program.

The Employment Navigators (ENs) worked directly and closely with tenants to identify and access supports to help them progress towards employment. The ENs were able to access the range of supports and services through the Employment Program of British Columbia (BC) delivered by ODG, including customized employment and could act as a bridge between these two service providers. ENP employed two Employment Navigators, one from housing (LO) and one from employment (ODG). Tenants in five Downtown Eastside (DTES) locations were eligible to participate in ENP.

Outcomes

Over the three years of ENP, 91 residents from 292 living in the five buildings participated in the ENP, giving the project a reach of 31 per cent (one in three residents). Almost 21 per cent (19) of participants were placed in employment or in employment training. Of these 19 individuals, ten have continued to work and nine work part-time within the DTES. It is important to appreciate that these participants were very distanced from the labour market and had not worked for many years. Participants stated they would not have found employment without ENP. In addition, 23 per cent (21) of participants took part in community programs including community clean-up and opioid peer support program.

Participants also achieved other outcomes essentially related to improved self-worth and increased self-confidence. As participants achieved their goals, this progress helped build positive momentum and supported other improvements in their lives. These other outcomes were very important to the overall success of ENP.

Implementation lessons

The key components of ENP were outreach, engagement, participant assessment and the development of an action plan. Throughout this process, the ENs provided ongoing support regardless of where participants were in the process. Progress through ENP was not linear, as participants seldom moved seamlessly into employment or training. Instead, their progress was often punctuated with starts, stops and challenges.

As noted, outreach was a critical element of ENP and allowed ENs to meet potential participants and explain how the project could benefit them. The place-based approach supported outreach as the ENP office was easy to access. Other outreach strategies included: personalized approach, regular drop-in held in five locations, and collaboration with tenant support workers to identify individuals who might be interested in ENP. The initial outreach activities were designed to raise the awareness of ENP and to differentiate ENP from traditional employment services.

Engaging participants was often a start, stop, restart process as participants worked to overcome challenges. The level of engagement reflected participants' health and well-being. When health and addiction issues were stable, participants tended to be more engaged in ENP. When these issues were less stable, participants were less engaged.

During the assessment process, the ENs worked with participants to identify goals and to break these down into smaller, more achievable milestones. The assessment process was very dynamic as participants' needs changed either because goals were met or because of changes in health and/or addiction issues. The ENs tried to ensure the action planning and goal setting was a collaborative process as participants had to buy into the process if they were going to succeed.

The ENs referred participants to WorkBC employment service centre and other community agencies. When attending programs with other service providers, some participants wanted ENs to be present for support. ENs often accompanied participants to appointments using this as an opportunity to prepare or debrief. When making referrals, the ENs tried to streamline the process by making sure participants had all the necessary paperwork completed before attending.

A total of six participants were referred to customized employment. Participants found it a useful and respectful process. From the perspective of the ODG vocational counsellor, ENP participants were more likely to attend their appointments and to come with the necessary paperwork.

Cross-sectoral partnerships

Both LO and ODG benefitted from being part of ENP. The organizations met monthly to oversee ENP and these meetings helped both to disseminate the lessons learned and improve practice. ODG obtained a better understanding of the barriers and challenges participants experienced and was able to maintain contact with participants, which ensured files remained open and they continued to access support. Lookout was able to offer tenants employment services and supports in addition to housing and health. These supports, in particular the pre-employment supports, helped participants address basic life skills needs.

The gross cost estimate based on the cost of operations in year three ranges from \$105 to \$120 monthly per active participant. This helps give an understanding of the resources used. This is strictly for ENs to provide the place-based services and navigation services and support. The intent of the housing and employment partners is to expand ENP services to other LO buildings after the project ended. This would likely increase the number of participants and reduce the per-participant cost. However, the intensive nature of the supports provided require smaller caseloads than what might be found in traditional employment programs.

Participant experiences with ENP

The experiences of those who participated in ENP provided insights that helped us understand the outcomes achieved as well as the nature of the successes and challenges encountered. Participants were initially apprehensive about taking part in ENP as they did not think employment was a realistic goal for them. Many participants were unsure whether they were physically or mentally able to work or whether they had the necessary skill sets. There was a risk involved in participating as participants had established routines that allowed them to manage their everyday lives. The ENs got to know these routines and worked around them, scheduling their meetings around existing appointments. The ENs helped participants work through their concerns, one step at a time, and provided them with the supports and services needed. This support was essential to helping participants find and sustain employment. Most participants had been living in the DTES area for several years without participating in community programs, training or working. ENP was the reason their situation changed.

Participants described ENP in positive terms and all would recommend the initiative to friends. The words used to describe ENP included: helpful, practical, caring, patient, kind, respectful, non-judgemental and welcoming. ENP was seen to be different to other services as the ENs had time to engage with participants, to listen to them and to provide a wide range of supports that simply were not available from other service providers. Participants credited ENP with providing practical help in resolving issues and problems that arose. Participant experiences suggest that success and failure both need to be managed. For many participants, success was a relatively new experience and brought about new challenges, such as having to manage workplace dynamics and stress, or having increased income which challenged their sobriety. Ongoing support for participants was critical in part due to the need to manage both successes and challenges.

No single factor triggered the movement towards or into work. The ENs invested time to develop trust with participants, connected them to supports and remain engaged with participants to help them collaboratively resolve issues and challenges before, during and after they found work or participated in a community program. Throughout this process participants stressed the importance of the hope ENP afforded them. In recognizing the importance of hope for ENP participants, other agencies looking to explore what comes after Housing First should consider implementing the HOPES model. This model builds on ENP and incorporates Housing, Outreach Plus Employment Supports.



Introduction

The implementation and evaluation of the Employment Navigator Project (ENP) was an exciting and unique opportunity for practitioners, policy-makers and evaluators to explore how best to support long-term unemployed individuals with multiple barriers to move into (or closer to) employment. The ENP model that was implemented incorporated best practice approaches to deliver employment supports to tenants in supportive housing — tenants who might otherwise have not considered employment as a viable option for themselves.

ENP built on the findings of Housing First Initiatives, which have demonstrated the importance of stable housing as a key component before attempting to address the complex issues many homeless people experience. Through Housing First Initiatives, individuals have been able to access a range of supports including health, income assistance and life skills programs. However, Housing First Initiatives have to date had limited success in helping people make progress towards employment. ENP was designed to address this gap by asking “What next?” in relation to helping tenants explore the possibility of employment. A key component of the evaluation was to explore what employment looked like to participants and how these supports affected other aspects of their lives. Other important questions included: was there a pathway to employment; was employment full-time, part-time or casual; and what pre-employment supports were required, such as education and training?

To deliver employment supports and services, the ENP model incorporated extensive outreach with a place-based approach, which meant tenants could access ENP supports close to where they lived. Tenants in five Downtown Eastside (DTES) locations were able to access Employment Navigator supports and services. This final report examines “*what was next*” for tenants who participated in ENP and documents the findings and lessons learned from ENP. This information has been used to identify the key features of the ENP that are crucial to delivering employment supports and services to tenants in supported accommodation. The evaluators have worked with project staff to develop the HOPES (Housing, Outreach, Plus Employment Supports) model, which incorporates these lessons and best practices and is described in this document.

Key partners in ENP

The Employment Navigator Project was a three-year project funded by the BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation’s Community and Employer Partnerships Research and Innovation Program. One-time funding was awarded to the BC Centre for Employment Excellence (CfEE). The CfEE is a division of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC). ENP brought together three agencies to develop, deliver and evaluate this initiative: CfEE, the Lookout Emergency Aid Society (LO) and Open Door Group (ODG). Lookout and ODG jointly delivered the employment navigator services. CfEE managed and evaluated the project.

The **Lookout Housing and Health Society** is a non-profit charitable organization established in 1971. Lookout is the project’s housing partner. It operates and manages the five residences which participated in ENP. LO offers a range of services and housing 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to adult men and women who are destitute and require assistance. They serve five communities in

Metro Vancouver and provide housing to approximately 1,100 people each night through supportive and transitional housing and shelters.

Open Door Group is a non-profit organization established in 1976 and is the project's employment partner. It operates the WorkBC Vancouver Downtown Eastside Employment Services Centre, and will connect project participants through the Employment Navigator with a range of client-centered services to support them to achieve employment or community attachment. Open Door Group provides employment services including Customized Employment, in eight locations, including Vancouver, Kamloops, the Sunshine Coast, South Okanagan, and Lillooet.

Background

The research literature is clear on the importance of housing, as well as employment and treatment to stop chronic homelessness.¹ In the last few years, British Columbia (BC) has focused on creating new housing options to help end homelessness. To make this happen, under the Provincial Homelessness Initiative, the province has partnered with local governments and community groups to build supportive housing. The province purchased and renovated buildings to protect the supply of affordable housing stock, and increased funding to the Homeless Outreach Program to better help people connect with housing and supports. The province has committed to developing new and upgraded supportive housing house units especially in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Despite these efforts, the DTES remains synonymous with high rates of poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, homelessness and high rates of unemployment.

Providing stable housing with supports to people who have had a history of homelessness addresses not only the issue of homelessness but also other related issues. While supportive housing provides assistance and works with residents on areas such as life skills and community engagement, tenants commonly face many challenges in attempting to find and keep work. Most tenants in supportive housing have multiple barriers to employment, including mental health issues, addictions and other disabilities. The tenants are unlikely to obtain work independently or successfully use traditional job search activities. In fact, the majority of people in this group have not had an attachment to paid work for a long time.² In general, on-site supports for tenants are not organized to meet the complex and challenging needs of this client group seeking employment and training. Tenants would need to go to the local employment office in their community to access employment services and support, and even a short walk to the local employment office can be a significant barrier to employment for many tenants, especially when combined with anxiety about new situations and having to complete forms and tell your story to a new case manager. A few initiatives have adopted a place-based approach to delivering services, which essentially means that the employment services are provided close to or in the same building as those who will be

¹ Chronic Homelessness Employment Technical Assistance Center, 2008. *Ending Chronic Homelessness Through Employment and Housing: A Program and Policy Handbook* Retrieved March 21, 2015 <http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/ending-chronic-homelessness-through-employment-and-housing-program-and-policy-handbook>

² SRDC, 2008. Downtown Eastside Case Coordination Project: Moving Hard-to-Employ Individuals from Welfare to Opportunity <http://www.srdc.org/publications/Downtown-Eastside-Case-Coordination-Project-Moving-Hard-to-Employ-Individuals-from-Welfare-to-Opportunity-details.aspx>

using them, to make access easier. The Jobs Plus Pilot Program also found that a place-based approach also enabled the service providers to better understand the context and the challenges clients were facing.³

However, despite barriers, employment plays an equally important role in recovery, ending homelessness, giving people more confidence and a feeling of success and increasing resources to pay for some of the necessities in life.⁴ As noted by Dr. Robert Drake from the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center: *“Nothing that I have studied has the same kind of impact that employment does: Medication, case management, and psychotherapies tend to produce a small impact on people’s overall adjustment. But the differences are often striking and dramatic with employment.”*⁵

While the evidence for Housing First programs is growing, relatively little is known about how to move beyond housing to provide individuals with meaningful things to do including finding employment. Recent evaluations of Housing First initiatives have found “employment results underwhelming” — meaning only a small proportion of individuals moved into work. Based on these findings, some authors suggested that employment targets of individuals in Housing First initiatives should be lowered to reflect the challenges and complexities the initiatives have to resolve before employment can be addressed.⁶ The challenge is what can be done to improve pre-employment and employment outcomes for a group of individuals in supportive housing with significant barriers to employment, especially since work could be a key part of the pathway to recovery and a better quality of life. The Crisis Skylight initiative began in 2012 in six cities across the United Kingdom (UK) and has developed an approach to helping homeless people progress towards employment. The key features and findings are highlighted below.

³ Tessler, B.L., Verma, N., Bigelow, J., Quiroz-Becerra, V., (MDRC) and Frescoln, K., Rohe, W.M., Webb, M.D, (University of Carolina at Chapel Hill), Khare, A.T, Joseph, M.L., Miller, E.K., (Case Western Reserve University) 2017. Scaling Up a Place-Based Employment Program: Highlights From the Jobs Plus Pilot Program Evaluation. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Policy Development and Research.

⁴ https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/documents/MHTS_Final_Report_508.pdf

⁵ Referenced in Vaz, J., Tallengrand, A., Harbus, N., (2014) Modifying the Supported Employment Model with a Housing First Population Downloaded December 2015 from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/513e08bfe4b0b5df0ec24cda/t/533f02e9e4b016f70ff654aa/1396638441122/Modifying+Supported+Employment+for+Better+Outcomes_Vaz.pdf

⁶ Busch-Geetsemna, V. (2013). Housing First Europe European Programme for Employment and Social Security.

Lessons from Crisis Skylight

Crisis is a national homeless charity in the UK. In 2002, it implemented the Crisis Skylight,^{7,8} which brings together an array of services to support homeless people.⁹ The program has four goals:

1. To promote good health and well-being,
2. To improve housing stability,
3. To improve good relationships and social networks, and
4. To increase paid employment and financial stability.

The services provided includes art-based activities, basic skills education, training, support with housing and health and extensive one-to-one support to help homeless people progress towards paid work. The key features of the model adopted by Crisis Skylight was flexibility, responds positively to the expressed needs and wishes of service users, nonjudgmental, respectful and strength based. For Crisis Skylight the outcomes are defined as progress towards the four goals outlined above.

The evaluation of Crisis Skylight, which was conducted between 2013 and 2015, reported that when individuals first engaged with the Skylight initiative, employment was reported as zero as none were working at this point. Work experience was unusual but not unknown. A small number of individuals reported traumatic experiences which had disrupted employment or education. However, most individuals reported they had never been in work or that if they had, it had been a long time ago. At best, paid work was an occasional experience.¹⁰

Over the three years of the evaluation, six sites worked with 14,922 people; of these, 1,452 individuals found paid work — that is, approximately 10 per cent of those who accessed services. The evaluation included a smaller cohort study of 158 individuals to explore in more detail how Crisis Skylight helped people progress towards the four goals. In terms of employment, of the 158 participants evaluated, 25 per cent had secured full- or part-time work. However, this finding was not consistent across all participants and evaluators reported that the progress experienced by individuals varied. For those who did progress, different pathways to progress were identified. The three main pathways were described as:¹¹

⁷ Bretherton, J., and Pleace, N. (2016). Crisis Skylight Pathways to Progression: Second Interim Report. University of York, UK and Crisis. Downloaded March 2016 from <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2015/SkylightEvaluationYr2%20v9.pdf>

⁸ Crisis (October 2015). The Journey Out of Homelessness: Impact Report 2014-2015 Downloaded March 2016 from http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/about_us/2015/ImpactReport_2015_FINAL_low-res_spreads.pdf

⁹ There are now 11 Crisis Skylight Teams across the UK.

¹⁰ Pleace, N., and Bretherton, J. (2017) Crisis Skylight Final report of the University of York Evaluation, University of York, UK.

¹¹ Ibid pages 37-42.

- **Regained progress:** Participants in this pathway were those whose normal working life, or whose progress through further or higher education has been disrupted by homelessness. Homelessness had often occurred because of mental health issues. Working with Crisis Skylight enabled individuals to return to paid work or return to training or education towards paid work. These individuals are seen as having been “knocked out of normal experience by homelessness.” Many in this group had experience of a career or higher education prior to being homeless and the majority quickly engaged with one-to-one support. Within the cohort study of the 158 participants, 36 per cent found paid work.
- **Moving forward for the first time:** These participants had very limited, or no work experience and whose formal education was incomplete. For these individuals, paid work and structured activities were not the norm and they were more likely to have mental health problems, prolonged experiences of homelessness and drug and alcohol use. When these individuals engaged with Skylight it was frequently through life skills, basic education or arts-related programs. Within the cohort study of the 158 participants, 33 per cent found paid work.
- **Punctuated progress:** These individuals had made progress towards employment, education or training but experienced “backwards steps ... and might be described as having their momentum stalled.” The reasons for these stalls could be loss of a job or deterioration in health, and the stall could last for several months. These individuals were described as wanting to work but they had to deal with the harsh realities of the labour market or limitations due to illness, disability and severe mental illness. This group accounted for 10 per cent of the cohort study and none has sustained paid work between 2013 and 2015.
- **Limited progress:** Participants in this pathway had low rates of contact with Crisis Skylight. A small number engaged with the arts related activities, but they had not made progress towards employment. Some of the reasons for this limited progress were related to poor mental or physical health. These participants accounted for 17 per cent of the cohort study.

The findings from the evaluation suggest that those individuals who progressed the most towards their goals had been the most engaged with the Skylight initiative and the staff. In terms of the employment outcomes, individuals differentiated the Skylight initiative from other employment programs because Skylight worked with individuals to identify their interests and then used this information to match them with employment, education or training. Traditional employment programs were seen as trying to place individuals in existing jobs rather than taking into consideration individuals’ interests and capacity. Participants responded positively to the user-led model, which afforded them choice and control over their own lives.

The rationale for the Employment Navigator Project

The existing literature and evidence from evaluations highlight the importance and benefits of using a Housing First approach to tackle homelessness. Once individuals are in stable housing, the challenge becomes how to help them make progress towards a range of goals, including employment. Traditional employment programs report limited success due to the complexity of

issues many formerly homeless people experience.¹² However, the Crisis Skylight initiative shows that formerly homeless individuals can make progress towards employment and that for some, paid work is attainable if one-to-one supports are available and time and effort is made to match individuals with jobs that interest them and leverage their skills and talents.

The Employment Navigator Project built on these best practice lessons of bringing housing and employment supports together to deliver employment services and supports to tenants living in supported housing. In addition, it enhanced the employment supports by incorporating customized employment approaches.

Components of the Employment Navigator model

Figure 1 below highlights the main components of the Employment Navigator model. Employment Navigators were recruited and trained to work with individuals in supportive housing. Individuals who agreed to participate in this project, worked with the Employment Navigators (ENs) to identify employment goals and to address needs to improve employment readiness by accessing a range of existing community supports. When appropriate, the ENs referred participants to ODG where they became ODG clients and were able to access the range of supports and services through the Employment Program of BC, including customized employment. In this way, ENP acted as a bridge between these two service providers. The aim of the Employment Navigators was to help participants access existing employment supports and to encourage individuals to consider the possibility of employment. To do this, the ENP model was client centred with the Employment Navigators providing one-to-one support to clients.

Figure 1 Main components of the EN model



¹² Poremski, D., Distasio, J., Hwang, S., Latimer, E. (2015). Employment and Income of People Who Experience Mental Illness and Homelessness in a Large Canadian Sample. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 60, No. 9 pp379-385.

ENP and the pathway to employment

The ENP model acknowledged it was unrealistic to expect ENP participants to move quickly into traditional employment. Previous research with residents in the DTES suggested the complex nature of the barriers experienced meant any return to employment would take time. The barriers were likely to include: prolonged absence from the labour markets, chronic homelessness, and complex health issues, including mental health and addictions issues.¹³ Previous experience of working with this population suggests change happens incrementally, with small steps being taken on a path towards employment.^{14,15} As a result, the definition of employment (having paid work) used in this evaluation of ENP was widened to encompass the steps taken towards obtaining employment as for some participants becoming employment-ready was a significant achievement. In addition, customized employment was included as an option within ENP to provide additional supports to participants to help them to return to work.

Customized employment

A key feature of ENP was intended to be the use of customized employment. Customized employment involves individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized assessment of the strengths, needs and interests of the participant. Customized employment uses ‘discovery’ as a way to get to know an individual without preconceived ideas of appropriate work or what is typically available in the local job market. Employment Navigators were to use this approach to support participants, and the information collected as part of this discovery process was fed into the formal discovery assessment conducted through WorkBC if participants were referred to ODG.

Staffing, ENP project location and supervision

Two Employment Navigators were employed: a fulltime position within Lookout and a 60 per cent position in ODG. In the third year of ENP, the ODG EN worked increased their involvement to 80 per cent. The Employment Navigators were based in an office within the Jim Green Residence. This location ensured convenient access by tenants from all participating residences. The Employment Navigators regularly held drop-in sessions in all participating residences.

Employment supervision and administration issues (scheduling, payroll, grievances, disciplinary issues, etc.) were managed by the respective employing agencies of the Employment Navigators. LO and ODG met monthly to review progress and provide supervision.

¹³ Busch-Geetsemna, V. (2013). *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Dobson, B., and Gurr, S. (2008). Downtown Eastside Case Coordination Project: Moving Hard-to-Employ Individuals from Welfare to Opportunity SRDC.

¹⁵ Dobson, B., and Gurr, S. (2008). City of Vancouver Four Pillars Supported Employment Pilot Project. SRDC.

Target populations

The Employment Navigator Project worked with individuals who had secured stable housing in LO residences. Across the five sites there were a total of 292 units. The five locations were full and had minimal turnover with a high demand for permanent housing and a lengthy wait list.

Characteristics of tenants included:

- Most tenants were single men
- Many had a history of chronic homelessness
- Many had various long-term health concerns, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, most commonly mental health and substance use challenges
- Few tenants had attachments to the labour market
- Many tenants had not worked for a long time
- The majority of tenants were low-income and mostly receiving Income Assistance, benefits for Persons with Disabilities, and other income security benefits. There were a few tenants who were Employment Obligated (EO), which means they are expected to work.

Aims and objectives of ENP

The main aim of the Employment Navigator Project was to provide individualized, flexible and holistic support to tenants living in supportive housing to help them access employment services and ultimately find and sustain employment.

The Employment Navigator Project had five specific objectives:

1. Raise awareness of range of employment related supports available to tenants of supportive housing;
2. Increase the access to employment services and supports for those in supportive housing;
3. Increase employment readiness of tenants of supportive housing;
4. Identify clients who would benefit from customized employment supports and to connect them with appropriate services; and
5. Broaden and deepen the partnerships between existing community and employment services, especially cross-sector collaboration.

The goal of the evaluation was to examine if ENP achieved these objectives and to identify best practices developed.

Evaluating ENP

The evaluation of ENP was designed to be comprehensive and because the model was new, the evaluators used a developmental approach. Previous experience evaluating complex initiatives involving vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach populations highlighted the need for a flexible but rigorous approach to this evaluation. As ENP was highly innovative, which meant that the program content and delivery mechanisms could change, the evaluation approach had to reflect this.

“Developmental evaluation is intended to support the process of innovation within an organization and in its activities. Initiatives that are innovative are often in a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they frequently unfold in a changing and unpredictable environment. This intentional effort to innovate is a kind of organizational exploration. The destination is often a notion rather than a crisp image, and the path forward may be unclear. Much is in flux: the framing of the issue can change, how the problem is conceptualized evolves and various approaches are likely to be tested. Adaptations are largely driven by new learning and by changes in participants, partners and context.”¹⁶

Within this evaluation, developmental evaluation allowed for changes in the ENP to be captured. The evaluators and the program team worked closely together to ensure information about change was collected systematically and informed the decision-making process regarding further program developments and improvements. A mix of research methods were used to address the key evaluation questions.

Key evaluation questions and expected outcomes

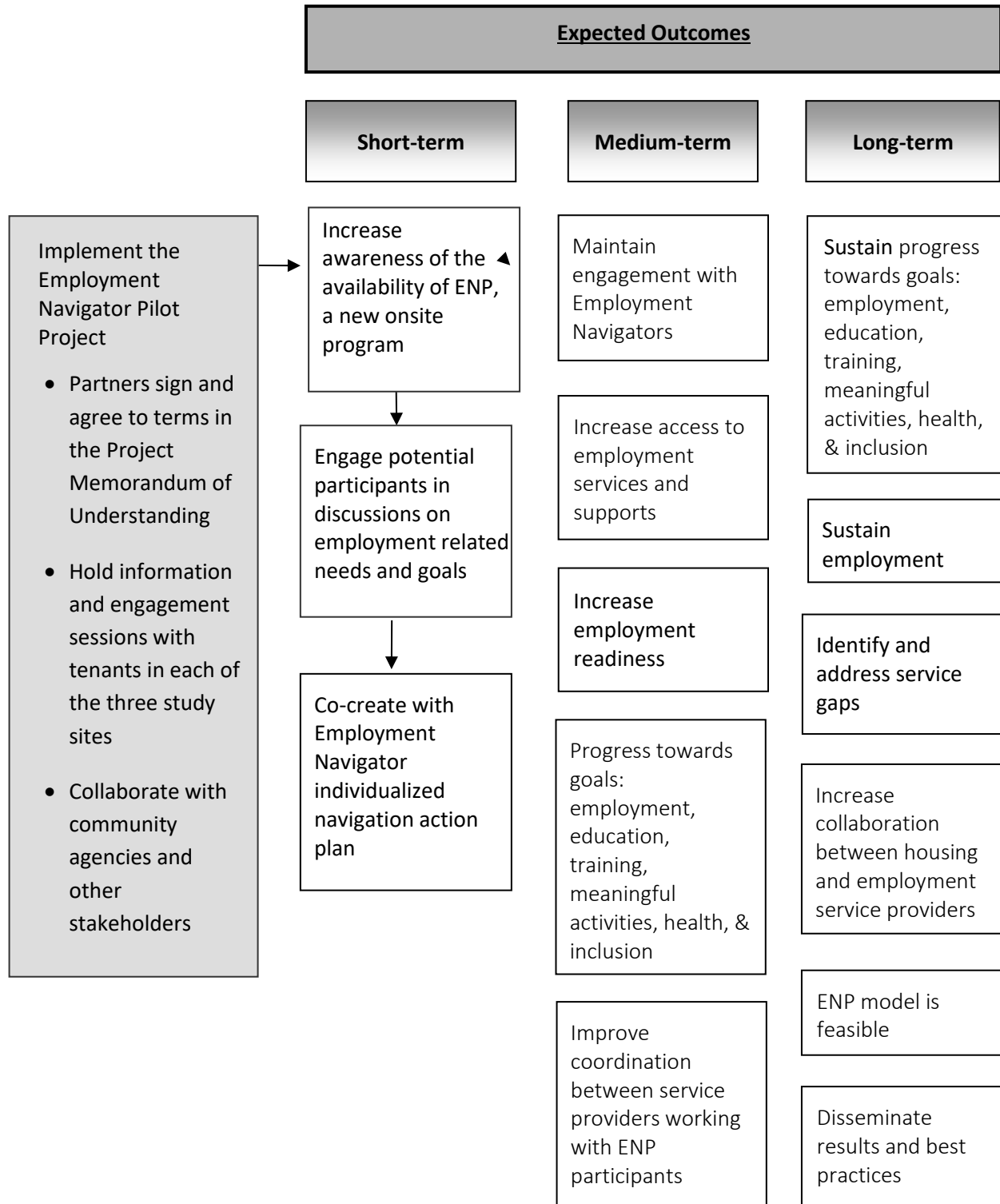
The five key evaluation questions were:

1. What did the Employment Navigator model deliver, to what extent did the model work, and why?
2. Were Customized Employment and other aspects of the ENP model effective in supporting tenants in supportive housing along the pathway to employment? What adaptations were needed to adjust Customized Employment for this population?
3. Did the initiative achieve its intended objectives? If not, what were some of the challenges?
4. What employment outcomes did the initiative achieve? What about pre-employment and other intermediary outcomes along the pathway to employment?
5. What were the lessons learned and best practices for connecting individuals with a history of chronic homelessness to employment?

The logic model (Figure 2) below shows these outcomes and the timeframe within which they were to be achieved.

¹⁶ Gamble J. (2008). The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, p. 13.

Figure 2 Logic model of expected outcomes of the Employment Navigator Project



Evaluation design

The evaluation design adopted consists of three components:

1. Implementation research
2. Case studies
3. Comparison site interviews

Implementation research

The gap between policy, practice and research has been well documented. There are many examples of pilot projects that seem promising when developed in an ideal setting but fail to deliver when transferred to a real-world setting. The barriers and constraints encountered as pilot projects attempt to become established programs get in the way of the intended outcomes, resulting in a program that fails to achieve its goals. Implementation research aims to take what we *know* and turn it into what we *do* by understanding the barriers and constraints, identifying potential solutions and testing these to see if they are effective.¹⁷ It is the combination of understanding the real-world context alongside effective resolution of the barriers and constraints that is needed to decide whether it is possible to implement a program across different contexts and settings. In this evaluation, the aim of the implementation research was to understand the real-world context in which ENP was developed and delivered so that the factors that supported or hindered the outcomes as well as the lessons learned were clearly identified.

The data sources for the implementation evaluation included:

- Aggregate program administrative data;
- Project administrative data including monthly progress and summary reports; participant numbers; referrals; and participant Navigator or action plans; and
- Annual interviews with Employment Navigators and stakeholders.

The implementation data was analyzed on an ongoing basis and the emerging lessons learned reported and discussed with the ENP team which supported further developments of the program.

Case studies

A total of ten case studies were conducted with ENP participants to explore their experiences of the project and the supports and services provided. The case studies were completed over the three years of the project and allowed for changes in participants' circumstances to be explored, including whether they progressed towards employment or improved employment readiness. Twelve participants were recruited for the case studies but only ten studies were completed as two participants moved out of the DTES. Each participant was interviewed four times and they

¹⁷ Source Measure Evaluation (2012). Fundamentals of Implementation Research. Carolina Population Centre, University of North Carolina in partnership with ICG Intl., John Snow, Mgt Sciences for Health Palladium and Tulan University p. 3–15.

received a small honorarium to thank them for participating. The interviews were digitally recorded, and the data was analyzed thematically.

Digital Storytelling.

Digital storytelling allows participants to tell their stories using digital media — in ENP, the medium was photography. ENP participants were invited to a two-day workshop where they received training about digital storytelling and discussed their experiences of ENP and employment. At the end of the first day, they were provided with a disposable camera and went out into the area with peer workers to take photographs which reflected some aspect of their story or experiences with ENP and or employment. The photographs were developed overnight, and during the second day of the workshop, participants selected their photographs, provided a caption and outline of the story they wanted to tell.

As part of this evaluation ten ENP participants were invited to take part the digital storytelling component. Eight participants attended and seven completed the workshop, four of whom were case study participants and three were ENP participants. The workshop leader was experienced in conducting these workshops and abbreviated the process to accommodate the needs of the participants. The digital storytelling workshop was appreciated by participants who found the process engaging and rewarding. The photographs included in this report and in the PowerPoint presentation were taken by participants in this workshop.

Comparator interviews with tenants

Six interviews were conducted with tenants of other LO residences — two interviews each year. The aim of these interviews was to explore if non ENP participants progressed towards employment. The interviews conducted with these tenants explored respondents' circumstances, experiences of homelessness and employment and whether they were interested in considering the possibility of employment. These interviews were recorded and analyzed thematically.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation findings are presented in four sections:

- An overview of participant characteristics and outcomes achieved;
- Implementation of the ENP model;
- Participant experiences with ENP; and
- Lessons for future practice.

However, before presenting the findings of the ENP evaluation, it is important to understand the context of the Downtown Eastside in which ENP operated and continues to operate.

The DTES

The DTES is a challenging place to live and work and remains one of the poorest neighborhoods in Canada.¹⁸ The area is synonymous with high rates of poverty, substance abuse, poor mental and physical health, poor housing, and high rates of unemployment. The population of the DTES has been estimated to be 18,477 with 60 per cent of residents being male. Over half of those living in the area were aged over 45 years and 22 per cent were seniors. Approximately 80 per cent of residents live alone and 10 per cent of the City's total Aboriginal population lives in this area (3 per cent of Vancouver's population is Aboriginal).¹⁹ The City of Vancouver estimates that life expectancy is notably lower in the DTES than for the city as a whole (76.9 compared with 84.2 years)²⁰. In addition to these challenges, the current opioid crisis is taking its toll on residents and service providers in the area. For those using illicit opioid drugs, during the first six months of 2017, overdoses averaged 180 per month.²¹ While those using opioids risk consuming fentanyl, service providers have been responding to more overdoses and death, which places additional strain on existing services. Residents have also had to deal with the overdoses and deaths of friends. These statistics highlight the complex challenges of those living (and working) in the DTES experience and it was within this environment that ENP was designed to reach and support residents living in this situation and help them progress towards employment.

¹⁸ Burnett, K. (2014). Commodifying poverty: gentrification and consumption in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, *Urban Geography*, 35:2, 157–176, DOI: [10.1080/02723638.2013.867669](https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2013.867669)

¹⁹ <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/profile-dtes-local-area-2013.pdf>

²⁰ <https://council.vancouver.ca/20170411/documents/rr2presentation.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.straight.com/news/1029776/two-blocks-east-hastings-street-saw-more-3000-overdose-calls-just-two-years>

Participant characteristics and outcomes

Over the three years of ENP, 91 residents from a total of 292 living in the five buildings participated in the project, giving the project a reach of 31 per cent. Of these 91 participants:

- Three-quarters of participants were male, and the majority were single individuals;
- The average age of participants was 47 years with the youngest aged 22 years and the oldest 64 years;
- Approximately 23 per cent of participants were Indigenous;
- Most participants had lived in the DTES for many years;
- The majority had not worked for more than ten years;
- Over 90 per cent of participants were in receipt of provincial disability benefits and were therefore not employment-obligated. For many, their disabilities were a combination of physical and mental health issues, including addiction;
- One in three participants did not have formal identification pieces, which are often a requirement for accessing services;
- Most participants had experienced periods of homelessness with many having sustained periods of time when they had lived on the street: the transition to stable housing was usually achieved via contact with a support worker in a shelter or hostel.

Main barriers and goals identified by participants

As part of the intake process, participants were asked to identify the main barriers they experienced in their everyday lives and that made it difficult for them to engage in employment or pre-employment activities.

Over half of participants reported mental health issues (54 per cent), with a similar proportion who reported addiction issues (52 per cent). In addition to these barriers, 30 per cent also experienced physical health challenges. Participants were dealing with complex multiple health challenges that changed over time. The good and bad days participants experienced meant that when their health and addiction issues were stable or improved, they attended appointments and engaged with programs, but when health issues, especially mental health and addiction issues dominated their lives, they withdrew from programs and “disappeared.” This episodic participation pattern is important to understand because traditional services and supports tend to close case files when clients miss appointments or fail to attend. ENP did not do this and took a different approach — instead the ENs reached out to participants, reassuring them they could return to the project when they were able to do so.

Participant goals

During the first year of ENP, participants’ goals tended to be very general, and not related to employment. These participants did not think employment or training was a realistic possibility as

they had not worked for a long time and were unable to return to their former job because of health issues. For these participants, employment was not a high priority. In addition, participants had established routines, they spent time lining up for food, they went binning and attended health appointments. All these activities took time and energy, and attending appointments for employment or pre-employment skills or training was not something participants considered.

By year three, this had changed, and at the time of intake, 70 per cent of participants had employment-related goals. For these participants, the main goal was to find part-time employment, which they believed they had the physical and mental capacity to achieve and sustain. The reasons for the increase in employment-related goals were related to ENP being more established in the area as an employment project, and tenants' awareness of participants who had found employment. This suggested that employment and pre-employment activities might be feasible for them. During the case study interviews, participants reported the ENs were the first people in a long time to talk with them about employment goals. Participants were willing to have conversations with the ENs about employment because they trusted them and were reassured that they would help them find a suitable job or activity. Those who considered work were mostly interested in part-time work, partly because health issues would not allow them to work full-time and because they needed to maintain their entitlement to income assistance, housing and medical benefits.

The reasons participants gave for wanting to work included finding something meaningful to do that would help them feel good about themselves and increasing their income. Approximately 17 per cent of participants wanted to improve their health; this included physical and mental health as well as to address addiction issues. Eleven per cent wanted to work to increase their incomes so they could afford to go shopping rather than rely on food line-ups; this would improve their everyday living.

Employment outcomes

One of the key evaluation questions was to examine the employment outcomes of participants. ENP participants did achieve employment outcomes.

- Almost 21 per cent (19) of participants were placed in employment or in employment training:
 - Of these 19 participants, ten have continued to work;
 - Only one participant worked full-time; the majority worked on a part-time basis within the DTES;
 - The main employer and provider of employment training was Atira property management. Atira is based in the DTES and provides front desk, security and janitorial services to buildings;
 - Five participants are currently working for Atira.
- Other employers included a mix of social enterprises and local businesses.

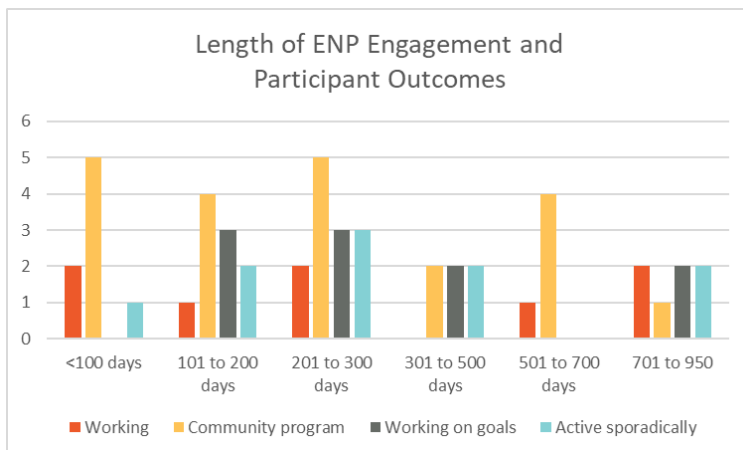
Three participants who were not able to sustain employment engaged with either the Community Cleanup program or the Opioid Peer Support Program (OPS). These participants worked a minimum of four hours for a \$20 honorarium.

These employment outcomes represent considerable achievements given the barriers participants experienced. It is important to remember these participants were very distanced from the labour market and had not worked for many years. All participants stressed they would not have found employment without the help and support of ENP.

Time required to achieve outcomes

Participant outcomes were examined by the number of days they had been engaged with ENP (see Figure 3). The finding that emerges is that engaging with participants and helping them move into employment or pre-employment activities took time. As expected, ENP was not a quick fix. Again, this is not surprising given the barriers participants experienced. It should also be noted that since participants had lived in the DTES they had not found employment; so while these outcomes took time to achieve, participants had not managed to find work before ENP. What is also encouraging is that participants remained engaged with ENP over a sustained period, which was also a positive achievement.

Figure 3 ENP engagement and participant outcomes



ENP employment outcomes in context

On initial examination the employment outcomes achieved by ENP may appear modest with ten participants moving into employment and these outcomes took time to achieve. However, by examining the outcomes alongside those from a similar initiative, the true value of ENP becomes clear. An earlier section described the Crisis Skylight initiative in the United Kingdom (UK). This section compares the outcomes from ENP with those of Skylight.

As described above, the Crisis Skylight evaluation team developed four patterns of progress towards employment. Table 1 shows the employment outcomes for ENP and Crisis Skylight for each of these categories. In doing so, it highlights how distanced from the labour market ENP participants were because of the complex barriers they experienced.

Table 1 ENP and Crisis Skylight

Case Categories	ENP	Crisis Skylight
Regained progress	1 individual working	36% (57 people)
Moving forward for the first time	0 (0 people working)	33% (52 people)
Punctuated progress	51% (9 working; 18 in community program; 10 working on goals)	10% of cohort and 0 found work (15 people and none found work)
Limited Progress	34% (0 working; 3 in community program)	17% of cohort and 0 found work (27 people and none found work)

Regained progress: Participants in this pathway were those whose normal working life, or whose progress through further or higher education, had been disrupted by homelessness. Homelessness had often occurred because of mental health issues. Working with Crisis Skylight enabled individuals to return to paid work or return to training or education towards paid work. These individuals were “knocked out of normal experience by homelessness.” Many in this group had experience of a career or higher education prior to being homeless and the majority quickly engaged with one-to-one support. Within the evaluation of Crisis Skylight, of the 158 participants **36 per cent** found paid work. Individuals in this category had the closest ties to the labour market and had not become entrenched in the homelessness.

- When the ENP was examined, only one participant met the criteria for the regained progress category. With support from ENP this individual returned to work. The majority of ENP participants had experienced sustained periods of homelessness and had not worked for many years. Although some ENP participants had established employment histories and had higher education degrees they had not worked for a long time and were not able to return to their previous employment.

Moving forward for the first time: These participants had very limited, or no work experience and whose formal education was incomplete. For these individuals, paid work and structured activities were not the norm and they were more likely to have mental health problems, prolonged experiences of homelessness and drug and alcohol use. When these individuals engaged with Skylight it was frequently through life skills, basic education or arts related programs. Of the 158 Crisis Skylight participants, 33 per cent found paid work.

- Within ENP no participants met the criteria for this category as participants were older with previous employment experience.

Punctuated progress: Individuals in this category made progress towards employment, education or training but experienced “backwards steps ... and might be described as having their momentum stalled.” The reasons for these stalls could be loss of a job or by deterioration in health and the stalls could last for several months. These individuals were described as wanting to work but they had to deal with the harsh realities of the labour market or limitations due to illness, disability and severe mental illness. This group accounted for 10 per cent of the Crisis Skylight study and none had sustained paid work between 2013 and 2015.

- Within ENP this was a different story. Just over half of ENP participants were in this punctuated progress category — that is, their progress started, stopped or went backwards.
- Nine ENP participants in this category found and sustained part-time work.
- 18 participants in this category participated in a community program.
- Ten participants were actively working on pre-employment and employment goals.

In ENP, the issues that caused progress to stall or reverse were largely health- or addiction-related. The ENs worked hard to remain engaged with participants so when they were ready, they were able to re-engage with ENP and to pick up where they left off. The engagement strategies were key in reassuring participants they could return to ENP without sanctions or judgement.

Limited Progress: Participants in this category had low rates of contact with Crisis Skylight. Within Skylight a small number of participants engaged with arts related activities, but they did not make progress towards employment. Some of the reasons for this limited progress were related to poor mental or physical health. These participants accounted for 17 per cent of the study.

- Within ENP, the limited progress category accounted for 34 per cent of participants. These participants had active challenging health and addiction issues and had the least engagement with ENP.
- Within ENP, no participants in this category found employment. However, three participated in a community program.
- The goal for ENP was to support participants to enable them to consistently attend appointments and to identify and work towards goals.
- Often the first goal was to obtain ID.

The remaining 12 (13 per cent) participants had moved, withdrawn from ENP, or died.

The findings from the evaluation of the Skylight program suggests individuals who progressed the most towards their goals had been the most engaged with the Skylight initiative and the staff. In terms of the employment outcomes, individuals differentiated the Skylight initiative from other employment programs because Skylight worked with individuals to identify their interests and then used this information to match them with employment, education or training. Traditional employment programs were seen to try and place individuals in existing jobs rather than taking account of interests and capacity. Participants responded positively to the user-led model which afforded them choice and control over their own lives.

ENP adopted a similar approach in working collaboratively with participants to identify employment options that best suited them. The element of choice was key, and participants were encouraged to try training, volunteering or employment, if it did not work out they could try something else. As in Skylight, those participants who engaged regularly with ENP, who attended appointments and meetings with the ENs were able to find and sustain part-time employment. Part of the explanation for this is that these participants had more stability in their lives and were not experiencing active mental health or addiction issues.

ENP outcomes extend beyond employment

ENP participants also achieved other outcomes which should not be overlooked. These outcomes related to participants having an improved self-worth and increased self-confidence. When participants felt better about themselves, they attended their appointments, they identified goals and developed plans for achieving them. These small wins for participants helped build positive momentum and supported other improvements, including taking better care of their health, improved compliance with medication and improved hygiene.

“Even if they have not all been successful [in gaining employment], it’s the empowerment, it’s the confidence, it’s the health aspect, more attention to their physical appearance and hygiene and eating better — that I’ve seen with all of the folks who have come in. And even for the ones who are just in the midst of exploring options and having the beginning conversations, it’s just that big step is the process of thinking (...). ‘Two months ago, I would never have thought about even considered working’ — so it’s just that action of considering a job in whatever form is a very, very, very big step.”

Implementation of ENP

It is important to have a clear understanding of the ENP implementation process so that the model and/or the lessons learned can be transferred to different locations or settings. The ENP model implemented:

- Was a place-based initiative that delivered employment related supports to participants;
- Did not deliver services itself, but rather leveraged and accessed other services currently available to participants — hence navigation;
- Had no limitations on the length of time participants could receive supports; and
- Continued to provide supports to participants when they were in employment, which provided a wrap-around approach.

Prior to implementing ENP LO and ODG worked together to set up the initiative, recruited staff and developed governance procedures.

- Setup and Staffing. ENP was similar to other place-based employment models in that it took time to set up the operational logistics of ENP and for the initiative to become established within the community. LO provided office space but each organization recruited their own employment navigator. It was important that those appointed had complementary skills and could work closely

together. Their first tasks were to develop shared data collection tools and processes. A significant challenge was sharing data between the two ENs and their respective organization. The difficulty arose because each organization had its own information management systems which could not be accessed by anyone who was not employed by that organization. To overcome this challenge, the evaluation team developed a limited information management system to process and store project administrative data.

Within 18 months, both original appointees left to pursue other employment opportunities and two new employment navigators were appointed. This type of staff turnover is not uncommon within this work environment. When reappointing, ODG decided to appoint a vocational counsellor who was trained in customized employment.

- Governance. LO and OD established regular monthly meetings which brought together the ENs, their managers and members of the evaluation team. These meetings were used to report on monthly progress, to identify opportunities for participants and to reflect on what was working and what could be improved. Bringing together managers and supervisors from both organizations helped to ensure ENP remained a priority for both partners and that learnings could be shared with their respective organizations on an ongoing basis.

Key components of ENP

There was a consensus relating to the key features of ENP. The essence of the ENP model was described as “bringing an employment lens to discussions and interactions” with tenants living in supported accommodation. This employment lens was useful as it “opened up new avenues” for discussions with tenants about their short- and long-term goals, including those relating to employment. This approach was perceived as new and different partly because many tenants had a designation of Person with a Disability (PWD) for the purposes of income assistance administration and were not required to work, but also because of the stereotypes that saw tenants as unable and unwilling to work.

The key components of ENP are described below.

Outreach

“The [navigator] role is unique because of outreach. If we were to pack up and leave, those people wouldn’t have found their way to employment, or some might, but it wouldn’t be as effective or as sustainable.”

Outreach was a key component of ENP and, as the quote suggests, it contributed to the success of the project. Outreach activities dominated the first year — the ENs spent considerable time visiting the participating buildings and engaging with tenants and the Tenant Support Workers (TSWs). Initiative and consistent outreach were necessary to overcome some of the skepticism and apprehensiveness of tenants who were not thinking about employment. As ENP became more established, outreach settled into weekly drop-in sessions in the buildings and TSWs would refer tenants to ENP.

The outreach activities enabled the ENs to meet potential participants and to explain to them how ENP could benefit them.

“Generally, first meetings are very casual with coffee and a snack and just sitting around getting to know each other, learning each other’s names, sharing each other’s experiences. And then from there making the next appointment if they are comfortable. But sometimes it takes half a dozen of casual meetings before they are ready to come in to fill out a paper.”

Different strategies were adopted as part of the outreach process:

- Place-based approach — The location of the ENP office within one of the residences meant that it was easy to access as it was close and familiar to tenants. Tenants were not apprehensive going to the ENP office.
- Personalized approach — The place-based model allowed the ENs to get to know the tenants/participants and were aware of what was going on in their lives. The proximity of the ENP office meant that they were able to drop in on participants and check in informally rather than relying on appointments. The ENs were also able to liaise with the TSWs if they had concerns about participants. Handwritten cards were dropped off to participants’ rooms to remind them about appointments or to invite them to reconnect/re-engage with ENP.
- Drop-in Sessions — These provided an opportunity to have informal conversations with tenants, to tell them about ENP, and to introduce the possibility of employment and to discuss the range of pre and employment supports available. Snacks were frequently provided during these sessions.
- Support from the TSWs — As part of the initial outreach, the ENs met with the TSWs to explain the employment focus of the project and the range of supports available. The TSWs helped the ENs to connect with tenants and to support participants.
- Raised awareness and developed trust — The initial outreach activities were designed to raise the awareness of the ENP and to inform tenants about the supports available. The ENs saw these activities as an opportunity to differentiate ENP from traditional employment services and emphasized the collaborative approach that would be used to help participants find employment or pre-employment activities that interested and were appropriate for them.
- Encouraged tenants to think about employment — Initially, tenants did not think employment was a realistic possibility either because of their health issues, because they had not worked for a long time or because they had criminal record. During the outreach activities, the ENs explained that employment was a realistic goal and explained how they could help.

Supports and services ENP provided

“The Employment Navigator Project starts with where the participants are at physically, mentally and emotionally. It provides continual support and connect them with information and services they want and need to move towards employment and other meaningful activities.”

The supports and services ENP offered were first and foremost participant-focused. The ENs started where participants were and worked towards employment from that point. For example, if participants needed ID, then that would be the first goal addressed.

When participants were ready to move towards employment, the ENs supported them in each step from completing forms to accompanying them to appointments with other service providers. The supports were holistic and tailored to the individual participants. They were not time limited and, if participants disengaged from ENP for any reason, they could re-engage when they were ready without having to start over with a new worker.

A key feature of ENP was that supports continued after participants found employment or were in training. The ENs continued to support participants to help them resolve issues and resolve problems. Some of the issues where these supports were required included workplace dynamics, opening bank accounts, and finding work-appropriate clothing.

The role of the Employment Navigator

“... a navigator is a ... resource, knows the resident individually and can have conversations that are not intimidating. It is about relationship building that over time transfers into work, in little steps.

The navigators help a person work through things that seem insurmountable. This may start with building life skills or helping someone feel comfortable in their home.

“Navigating” is the key feature.”

The role of the ENs was crucial to the success of the project and it evolved over the lifetime of the project. The key features of the role included:

- Trust — The EN role was essentially about establishing a trusting relationship with participants that encouraged them to take steps towards becoming more employment-ready or moved them into work.
- Flexible approach — The ENs were aware that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work with participants. It was important for them to adopt a flexible to meet the needs of participants. For example, some participants were happy to come to the ENP office, others preferred to meet in their own buildings; some participants only needed reminders to attend appointments, while others needed more support to attend referral appointments. With these participants, the ENs met for coffee before or after an appointment to either prepare or debrief. The key was to tailor the approach and the supports to the participants.
- Problem solving — Some participants needed support with problem solving as they attended training or returned to work. Issues arose that proved challenging for participants and the ENs helped to resolve these. Participants were encouraged to stop by and talk over issues with the navigator rather than worry about them or withdraw from training or employment. During these conversations the ENs helped them to arrive at a solution they happy with and that would enable them to keep moving forward such as help with workplace dynamics and opening a bank account. What was important was that access to the navigators was easy and quick.

Engagement

Engaging participants was often a start, stop, restart process as participants worked to overcome challenges. The ENs adapted their approach to the needs of the participant. The ENs would engage with tenants initially at drop-in sessions where they would talk to them about ENP and generally get to know tenants. These were tentative conversations but as tenants got to recognize the ENs, they established a rapport and built trust. Some of the initial one-on-one meetings between the ENs and participants would involve meeting over a coffee, which created a more relaxed approach but also reinforced how different ENP was to other more traditional services.

Assessment and action planning

The assessment process took time to complete: how much time depended on the individual participant. For those participants who were focused and knew what they wanted to achieve and whose life had some comparative stability, the assessment process was completed over one or two appointments. However, for others the process took longer to complete because participants did not keep appointments or needed to address issues relating to life skills before being able to discuss employment goals. During the assessment process, the ENs worked with participants to identify goals and to break these down into smaller, more achievable milestones.

The assessment process was very dynamic as participants needs changed, either because the goal was met or because of changes in health and/or addiction issues. The ENs tried to ensure the action planning and goal setting was a collaborative process. They were aware participants had to buy into the process if they were going to succeed. The goal had to be important and within the reach of the participant. This collaborative aspect of ENP surprised some participants as they were unaccustomed to being asked what they wanted to do; they were more familiar with attending a service for a predetermined reason.

Referrals to other services and supports

ENP did not provide services but leveraged existing services. The ENs made referrals to WorkBC employment service centre and other community agencies including Embers, Mission Possible, Wish, Strathcona Mental Health and HAVE. It was important to participants that the referral process was collaborative and that they had a choice regarding which service provider they were referred to. This was because some participants had previous negative experiences with certain providers and did not want to attend there.

When referrals were made to other providers, some participants were reluctant to attend on their own and wanted an EN present to ensure they were treated respectfully, while others wanted the practical help and support of having another person present during the appointment.

When making referrals the ENs tried to streamline the process by making sure participants had all the necessary paperwork completed before attending. This would avoid participants attending an appointment but not being able to proceed because of missing information.

Meeting participants prior to or after appointments or attendance at workshops was important for preparation and debriefing. Sometimes, the Employment Navigators used petty cash to buy coffee and a snack, especially if participants missed their meal because of the time of the appointment.

ODG Customized Employment and ENP

Customized Employment (CE) was designed to be a key feature of ENP as it acknowledged that many participants were unlikely to find work through traditional job search activities given the complex barriers they experienced. The customized employment process involves individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized assessment of the strengths, needs and interests of the participant. Customized employment uses discovery as a way of getting to know an individual without preconceived ideas of appropriate work or what was typically available in the local job market.

A total of six participants accessed customized employment, and those who did found it a useful and respectful process. From the perspective of the ODG vocational counsellor, ENP participants were more likely to attend their appointments and to come with the necessary paperwork.

The CE process consisted of three appointments but there was usually a gap of one or two weeks between appointments. The process involved:

- Establishing interests/goals and completing paperwork;
- Completing a Disability Related Employment Needs Assessment (DRENA) if appropriate, and deciding on customized employment or further assessments. A DRENA is conducted by the vocational counsellor to identify and confirm specific disability-related factors that may impact employment outcomes.
- Conducting a discovery and work task analysis.
- Connecting with employers and job developer.

Those participants who met with a vocational counsellor as part of CE were motivated by the process. It challenged participants in a positive way to think about their futures. The CE process took between six to eight weeks to complete, which was a relatively long time if participants were keen to work. Early feedback from participants highlighted the need to streamline the process. To streamline this process, ODG hired a vocational counsellor when replacing the original ODG EN in the third year. The time taken to complete the CE process was reduced. This made CE placed-based and easier to access for participants.

The importance and benefit of partnerships in ENP

One of the aims of ENP was to broaden and deepen partnerships between existing community and employment services, especially cross-sector collaboration.

ENP and tenant support workers

The close working relationship between ENP and the Tenant Support Workers was very important to the success of the project.

“Many participants are very entrenched in their addiction and mental health, so this is a difficult population, sometimes they forget an appointment and feel embarrassed. I find with the navigators, they are on top of things and they don’t make them feel guilty about it and they keep showing up and I think that helps. I think it’s taking a bit longer because of the clientele that we do have, but it’s baby steps and it’s starting to work.”

The TSWs were very supportive of the ENP and referred and encouraged tenants to engage with the initiative. The TSW support gave credibility to the ENP and reassured tenants who were skeptical about the project especially one that was employment-focused. The type of support TSWs provided included supporting outreach and engagement opportunities for the employment navigators. The ENs were invited to participate in breakfast sessions and in other activities in buildings which gave them an opportunity to meet with potential participants and to raise awareness about the project. The TSWs worked with the ENs to support participants and encouraged them to work towards their goals and provided reminders for appointments including wake-up calls in the morning for appointments. The TSWs also gave the ENs a “head’s up” if a participant was not doing well or if they needed additional support. Over the three years of ENP, TSWs saw the benefit of the initiative in that the employment navigators had the time and experience to provide ongoing supports to tenants and to help them access other appropriate services.

Community Cleanup and Peer Program

ENP also worked with two community programs, Community Cleanup and the Opioid Peer Support Program. Both were based in the DTES and were Lookout programs. These programs were important because they provided different avenues for participation for participants who were not ready for or did not want a more traditional job. Community volunteer programs provided tenants with an honorarium for working a four-hour shift and helped to establish work routines as participants signed up for shifts on a weekly basis. The payroll for these programs was administered by the LO EN, which provided an opportunity for them to engage with tenants who might not have attended drop-in sessions.

The benefits ODG garnered from being part of this place-based service was that it had more direct access to individuals who used its services. As a result, the ODG EN, and the organization as a whole, obtained a better understanding of the barriers and challenges participants experienced. These challenges included:

- the timing of appointments
- avoiding medication times
- not scheduling appointments at a time that would necessitate participants missing meals
- the difficulties some participants experienced in accessing the most basic paperwork

- the high levels of stress and anxiety experienced by participants when they attended appointments.

A direct benefit from participating in ENP was that the ODG EN was able to maintain contact with participants which ensured their files remained opened and they continued to access support.

By being part of ENP, LO was able to offer tenants employment services and supports in addition to housing and health. These supports, especially the pre-employment supports helped participants address basic life skills needs. Lookout also gained a greater awareness of the types of employment supports available to tenants.

Implementation lessons

The implementation lessons that emerged from ENP include:

- A governance model that directs ENP and provides practical and operational supports to overcome issues that arise.
- Good communication was vital between all partners
- Data sharing between both organizations proved challenging due to issues accessing data management systems. All involved must be able to access information quickly and effectively.
- Making the ODG EN a vocational counsellor in the third year, which reduced referral time and streamlined the WorkBC referral process as well as the CE process.
- The place-based model was crucial and was an important factor in the success of ENP. Tenants would not have participated in a program that required them to go to another location. In addition, the ENs got to know participants and could schedule appointments when they were most likely going to be kept and participants could drop in if they had questions or wanted help.
- The ENs were able to tailor their approach to best meet the needs of participants.
- The participants had consistency and continuity in service. It was important to participants to know who they were going to meet with and they appreciated not having to repeat their story to new workers.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons is that establishing ENP took time. Most tenants in the participating buildings were in receipt of disability benefits as they were not able to sustain full-time employment. Hence, for many individuals any sort of employment did not seem to be a realistic possibility. ENP is slowly changing that perception and while the additional income is welcomed by participants, the therapeutic aspects of work should not be overlooked.

Calculating the cost of ENP

The evaluation did not include a cost-effectiveness study of the Employment Navigator Project. The operations achieved more stability in its last year. As mentioned, it took time to engage with participants and to help them make small progress towards employment. Thus, only estimates of the program's gross cost are presented, which helps us understand the resources used for this investment.

The operations cost in the last year had two key components: salary and benefits for a full-time employment navigator with the Lookout and salary and benefits for an 80 per cent position at ODG. In addition, there was the petty cash, which amounted to approximately \$300 annually. The Lookout provided the office space at no cost.

In calculating the costs, we assumed at a steady state of operations in the project, the ENs had a caseload between 80 and 90 participants.

The gross cost estimate based on the cost of operations in year three ranges from \$105 to \$120 monthly per active participant. This is strictly for ENs to provide the place-based services and navigation services and support described.

If we restrict the cost estimates only to participants engaged in employment or paid community work, the cost ranges from \$316 to \$395 per participant per month.

Several factors can make the operating costs lower or higher than projected here. The intent of the housing and employment partners is to expand the navigator's services to other buildings in the immediate area after the end of the project. This would increase the number of participants and reduce the per participant cost. However, it is important that the caseloads remain smaller than what would be found in traditional employment programs.

Participant experiences of the ENP

ENP was intended to be a participant focused service and, as such, the experiences of those who accessed the project, have provided insights which help us understand the outcomes achieved as well as the nature of the successes and challenges encountered. As mentioned earlier, data detailing participant experiences came from the ten case studies conducted.

The digital story component of the evaluation also provided information about the participant experiences with ENP. The digital story workshop was modified to accommodate the needs of participants and was completed over two days. The workshop was attended by six participants, three of whom also participated in the case studies. The photographs included in this report were taken by participants in the digital story telling workshop and who gave permission for us to use their photos.

Finally, four interviews were conducted with individuals who lived in other Lookout residences who did not participate in ENP. Individuals were interviewed once per year and the purpose of these interviews was to explore if individuals who were not part of ENP progressed towards employment.

Participants' perspectives

As already discussed, participants were initially very skeptical about ENP but as the project became more established, participants were more aware of the aim of project and how it could help them. This process took time and relied on a good working relationship with the ENs. For some participants their hesitancy was replaced by surprise as they started to achieve goals.

"I didn't know what it was about; I wasn't sure if I could work or what I wanted to do, now look at me — I don't recognize me! I am working, I am doing something useful."

These participants became champions for ENP by recommending it to other tenants and reassuring them they have nothing to lose if they chose to take part.

"I tell everyone to try ENP, who knows, I tell them you won't lose anything, you don't know until you try."

The beginning: One step at a time

The data from the case study interviews highlighted how unsure participants were about signing up to ENP and to begin exploring employment as a realistic option for them. When asked about the reasons for this hesitancy, it was change and especially making a commitment to work was a daunting prospect. Many participants were unsure whether they were physically or mentally able to work and did not know if they had the necessary skill set. ENP helped them work through their concerns, one step at a time and provided them with the supports and services needed.

One participant stated:

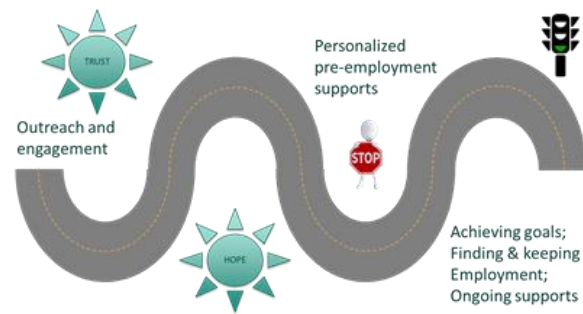
“I didn’t think I could work, didn’t think anyone would give me a job. I didn’t know where to start, I had nothing to put on a resume, no references. I wouldn’t give me a job. What changed? Talking with the navigators, they convinced me I had nothing to lose, if I tried and it didn’t work out, that was ok and I could take my time, one step at a time.”



This photo taken by a participant highlights that for them and, indeed for most participants, ENP was about one step at a time. The ‘1’ you see in the photo above the steps, reminded the participant that taking the first step was the most difficult. The first step was agreeing to participate in ENP. Participants appreciated not being rushed but were given time to develop a trusting relationship with the ENs. ENP provided the necessary supports to take that first step and to move onto the next step.

The pathway towards employment

The case study interviews explored the pathway towards employment. For the majority of ENP participants, not just those who participated in the case studies, the pathway towards employment was not a straight road illustrated by the graphic. All participants experienced ups and downs; things that went well and others that were challenging and stopped them in their tracks. When the case study participants were asked what kept them going or got them started again, they stated it was the hope, trust and practical support provided by the ENs. The challenges that stopped participants were a deterioration in health – mental and physical, addictions, lack of confidence, and difficulties in acquiring paperwork including ID or other records. Things that helped participants were ongoing support, practical personalized help and support, help with problem-solving skills and not feeling alone. With support some participants achieved their goals which included, securing and sustaining employment. Smaller more immediate goals included: increased income, being able to help family, having a social life, not being hungry, buying food for a pet and saving for a phone or computer.



The pathway towards employment was different for every participant because of the barriers experienced. Throughout this journey, the ENs worked hard to remain in touch with participants and to help them move forward when they were ready. A powerful message for participants was that it was acceptable to change the goal posts: the important thing was to move on in a positive way. Participants understood that if something did not work out, they could try again.

ENP and success

“We’ve seen people move along some sort of an employment continuum. This doesn’t necessarily mean they got a job, but maybe they’ve developed more confidence, maybe they’ve gained a new skill set, maybe became ready to go to school, or they considered self-

employment. The life path is often messy. It is seeing someone make any sort of positive movements that is applicable to them not on a pre-defined ladder.” “This has been one of the biggest milestones accomplished: every participant has had some sort of win.” Other changes: overall quality of life has improved, or at least they’ve broadened their understanding of what’s possible.”

Employment outcomes were important to ENP, but participants also achieved other outcomes which helped to build momentum and established ENP as a worthwhile resource. The intermediary steps achieved such as those described in the quote were important. The non-employment successes included increased self-confidence and improved self-esteem. A recurring theme throughout the case study interviews was surprise — participants surprised themselves with what they had been able to achieve. They felt better about themselves and were encouraged to keep going and see where they could end up.

ENP supports

The support provided by ENP was essential to helping participants find and sustain employment. The participants had been living in the DTES area for several years without participating in community programs, training or working. ENP was the reason their situation changed.

The type of supports provided were tailored to the individual participant and included pre-employment as well as employment supports. The ENs provided wrap around supports and they were the point of contact for participants if they needed help with any aspect of working or attending training.

As mentioned before, the ENs reassured participants and if challenges were encountered, they also provided practical help to solve the problem. Often this help was relatively small — for example contacting service providers on behalf of participants to follow up on issues, re-arranging appointments, helping participants them complete paperwork and accompanying them to appointments when they had concerns.

The ENs realized that when individuals achieved goals or got a new job, they appreciated having their efforts recognized. It made them feel good and built positive momentum. Over half of the case study participants did not feel they had someone to celebrate their successes with other than the ENs. When asked why this mattered, participants explained not only did it recognize their efforts and hard work but also because it connected them to the real world and reminded them they could move forward.

For many participants, the ODG vocational counsellor and navigators tried to ensure they were placed in jobs where the environment and management is supportive. While feedback from participants was very positive, some issues emerged as participants transitioned into work. When issues arose, participants turned to the ENs for support. Sometimes this involved talking through issues; in other instances, the ENs were able to provide direct supports by accessing a range of services including financial and health.

To help prepare participants for work or training, the ENs talked through what would happen on the first day of work or a program. They made sure participants knew how to get to the correct

location and they had bus passes if necessary. They helped coordinate wake-up calls from TSWs and worked out how they were going to manage their health issues including changing the timing of when they took their medication. The ENs arranged to follow-up and check in with participants during the first weeks of work to see how things are going and if they needed anything. In addition, participants knew they could drop-in to the ENP if they needed anything. The feedback from participants suggests that an important component of the support provided is in terms of participant confidence.

Risking the status quo

An important theme that emerged from the case studies related to the participants feeling they risked their current status quo by engaging in ENP and that they had little confidence their participation would lead to an improvement in their circumstances. Participants worked hard to



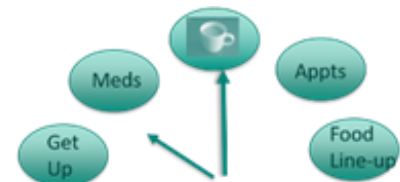
maintain their status quo – they had somewhere to live, they knew where to get food, some volunteered or binned but they had a routine that worked for them. Asking participants to risk their status quo for the possibility of employment, something which they did not think feasible, was from their perspective, asking a lot. For participants, life was precariously balanced; if they missed a meal, they went hungry.

“[The participant] is thinking I’m just going to go out and pick bottles, at least I’m going to make money today.... It costs them to go these meetings. It takes him 4 hours to make \$12 but at least he knows he will get that every day.”

The interviews with participants suggested they made rational decisions to stick with what they knew rather than risk their status quo. The decision to participate in ENP was more complex for participants when the opportunity costs were considered. It was not just a case of what they might achieve in the long term but what they could lose in the short term.

Established routines

The routines established by participants enabled them to manage their everyday lives. Changing these routines was challenging because participants were unsure whether the new routine would be manageable. For some, their routines centred around taking their morning medications, getting breakfast, attending medical or other appointments and lining up for food. Some also had binning routines, participated in street markets or helped friends with shopping or cooking.



The ENs got to know these routines and worked around them. Participant routines also demonstrated the effort required to maintain their daily lives and how resourceful they had to be to do so.

The discipline of poverty²²

Participants who were not dealing with active addictions managed to make ends meet because they had worked out their finances down to the last cent. Their lives were governed by a discipline of poverty in which they had little choice over what they did, ate or where they went.

"I have my finances worked out. I know where every dollar, every cent goes."

"I live from one cheque to another. When the money runs out then you line up to eat."

"I don't remember the last time I bought anything new, from a store. I can't remember when I chose something, like actually went and picked out what I wanted."

"I use the Sisters for food, so I can buy food for my cat."

Having extra income from a job or participating in a community program afforded them some choice which they appreciated. One participant was thrilled at being able to go to a movie with friends, something he had not done in years and it reminded him of a world outside the DTES.

Setting goals

Part of the assessment and action planning process involved identifying and setting employment-related goals. For some participants this process was very challenging as they could not envision themselves working on a regular basis. For others, especially those who had greater stability in their lives, setting employment goals was more straightforward.



Part of the challenge of setting goals was that it involved looking to the future and admitting to yourself that you wanted something better, something other than the current situation. Setting goals required hope and a sense of self worth.

The ENs worked with participants to set realistic and meaningful goals. They then helped participants to break these goals down into smaller, more immediately achievable goals and developed plans to achieve them. When participants achieved their goals, they had a sense of achievement and pride, which was shared by the ENs. If things did not go as planned, the ENs encouraged participants either to try again or to set a new goal. The most important goal was perhaps to keep moving forward.

"I still have things I would like to achieve, I've fallen a long way materially (mental health issues, homelessness). I worked all my life until this, I want to get back there. For now, I am satisfied with little victories, just got to keep going. I wasn't able to do that on my own. Too much paperwork, too many appointments. Workers look at you and judge, the ENs listen, they help, and they are pleased for my little victories. Now I consider myself fortunate."

²² Dobson, B., Beardsworth, A., Keil, T. and Walker, R. (1994). Diet, Choice and Poverty: Social, Cultural and Nutritional Aspects of Food Consumption among Low Income Families. London: Family Policy Studies Centre, ISBN 0907051758.

The importance of ENP to participants

The light at the end of the tunnel

Participants were asked how they would describe ENP to friends and what it meant to them. This photograph, taken by a participant, described ENP as the light at the end of the tunnel. This view was shared by many. For them, ENP gave them hope that they could move towards employment, find work, and that the process would improve their everyday lives.



All participants described ENP in positive terms and all would recommend the initiative to friends. The words used to describe ENP included helpful, practical, caring, patient, kind, respectful, non-judgemental and welcoming. ENP was seen to be different from other services as the ENs had time to engage with participants, to listen to them and to provide a wide range of supports that were not typically available at other service providers.

Two key features differentiated ENP from other services:

- **Door-to-door support.** This was when the ENs went to someone's building or room before an appointment and walked with them to the appointment. They might attend the appointment for support or return and walk back with the participant, debriefing as they went. Without this type of support, participants stated they would not have attended the initial appointments because they were too apprehensive given past experiences with service providers.
- **Open door.** The second aspect which differentiated ENP was that if participants missed appointments or stepped away for a period, they knew they were able to return when they were ready to do so. When participants were not actively engaged with ENP, the ENs often stopped by to check participants were all right, to see if they needed anything and reassure them they were welcome back when they were ready.

ENP as the driving force

For many participants, ENP was the driving force that helped them moved forward. The individual who took this photo did so because of the sign on the truck — driving force — but also because of the Indigenous artwork in the centre, which they saw as symbolic. Participants were at the centre of this ENP process, it was a client-/participant-focused service. The encouragement and practical help provided by the ENs helped participants work towards their goals.



Practical, problem-solving help

A common theme across the case studies was the importance of the practical help and problem-solving provided by the ENs. Many participants were reluctant to step outside what was familiar to them to access help. Participants often went without something either because they did not know who to ask for help or they were reluctant to do so because they had been refused help in the past.

When participants experienced challenges, some found it difficult to problem-solve, to think their way through an issue and come up with a solution. The ENs helped participants with this process. For example, a participant experienced long delays in completing their criminal record check, which was needed prior to starting work. Attempts to speak with the agency or respond to messages were difficult as the participant did not have a phone — when placed on hold for several minutes, the individual would have to end the call. The participant was frustrated and worried he would lose the job offer. The EN met with the participant, called the agency and during the call the participant provided additional information and the issue was resolved. This participant obtained the job.



One participant took a picture of a pair of new glasses. This individual had been unable to arrange an eye exam and to get the glasses needed. The glasses were essential as without the individual could not read. The ENs provided the practical help to resolve the problem. This participant secured employment and continues to work.

Coping with success and failure

The experiences of participants suggest that success and failure both need to be managed. For many participants success was a relatively new experience and brought new challenges, such as having to manage work schedules, workplace dynamics and stress, or having increased income, which challenged their sobriety. Managing successes and challenges explains why ongoing support for participants was vital. One participant quoted Winston Churchill who said: “Success is not final and failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that is important.”

While employment was a positive experience, it also brought about challenges. Table 2 below lists some of the positive and challenging aspects of work.

Table 2 Positive and challenging aspects of finding work

Positive aspects of work	Challenging aspects of work
Sense of purpose and feeling happier	Establishing new routines
Being able to help friends	Managing workplace dynamics and workplace stress
Improved health	Managing money
Increased self-esteem	Maintaining health
Making realistic future plans	Maintaining sobriety
Improved financial situation including enough money to buy food	Sustaining work

What worked in ENP?

“Everyone has their story, and everyone has a path. It’s not the same for everyone.”

No single factor triggered the movement towards or into work. The ENs invested time to develop trust with participants, connected them to supports and remained engaged with participants to help them collaboratively resolve issues and challenges together before, during and after they found work or participated in a community program.

The features of ENP which helped participants make progress towards employment or become more employment ready included:

- Participant focused — Tailoring the approach to suit the individual participants and focusing on their needs as a starting point.
- One-on-one support — Intense individual support that continued throughout ENP.
- Flexibility — Adapting the approach and delivery of supports to reflect individual needs.
- Consistency — Participants benefitted from continuity of staff as they did not have to retell their story. If they stopped attending ENP, participants could restart where they stopped.
- Low Barrier Access — There were no pre-existing criteria for participation. ENP was open to all.
- Focus on pre-employment needs — Pre-employment needs were addressed first as they helped established trust and were quick wins.
- Trust — ENs worked hard to establish trust and to work collaboratively with participants.
- Hope — The ENs tried to keep participants feeling hopeful and encouraged them to try programs that were outside their comfort zone reassuring them of their ongoing support.
- Follow-ups — Short follow-up times meant issues were resolved as they arose.
- On-going support — ENP support continued after a placement if needed and participants could drop into the ENP to touch base and talk through issues that arose. If the placement did not work out, ENs helped find an alternative.
- Governance — The support from LO and ODG was key to developing the ENP model, operating it and ensuring it remained a priority of both agencies.

What happened without ENP?

The comparator interviews allowed the evaluation to explore what happened if individuals did not receive help and support to become more employment ready or find work. Interviews were conducted with individuals who were not eligible to participate in ENP as they lived in other residences. These individuals were similar to ENP participants in that they were very distanced from the labour market and experienced complex health and or addiction issues. Over the three years of ENP none of the individuals interviewed considered employment or pre-employment activities — realistic options for themselves. They were unaware of how to access pre-employment

or employment supports or whether they were entitled to do so. During this period, these individuals did not engage in any pre-employment- or employment-related activities.

Individuals responded positively when they were asked about whether they would be interested in ENP; they were surprised to learn about the project and stated they would appreciate the EN support.

“How do I get there? How do I go about it? What do I need to do? How to present myself? Do these jobs exist? How do I problem-solve or troubleshoot? Is it even possible? Do I need to do it myself?”

“I don’t even know what’s out there. And I can’t use a computer to search. I need help from somebody to figure it out.”

Building on ENP and looking ahead

ENP has demonstrated that it is possible to support long-term and multi-barriered individuals to return to the labour market on a part-time basis if they have the necessary supports in place. The findings from this evaluation show that ENP was successfully implemented and the model was modified as based on implementation findings.

ENP worked with individuals who were very distanced from labour market and supported participants to move into employment:

- Ten participants moved into paid employment
- 21 participated in community programs.

In recognizing the achievements of ENP, ODG and LO will sustain the EN positions until the end of fiscal year 2018/2019. Both organizations have incorporated the lessons learned about how best to support participants into programs in other settings.

The HOPES model

“The Navigators gave me hope. Without them I wouldn’t have a job, they made the difference. They believed in me. ... Look at me now, I am a different person.”

“They wished me well and gave me a bit of hope. It was what I needed to try going back to work.”

Hope was important to all ENP participants: without it they were not able to move forward. ENP helped participants to feel hopeful about themselves and their futures — something they had not felt in a long time. This photo of new growth on a tree stump represented a new beginning to participants and the hope for a brighter, a more fulfilling future in part-time employment or through participating in community programs.





Given the importance of hope to participants, the evaluation team suggest the next iteration should be the HOPES model. The key components of this model should be:

- Housing
- Outreach
- Plus Employment Supports

Each component is important if the model is to be successfully implemented. The findings of this evaluation suggest the HOPES model could help individuals, when they are housed, to become

more employment-ready or find employment which could improve their everyday lives. The ongoing supports could help address issues when they arise and keep participants on track and moving forward.