



BC CENTRE FOR
**EMPLOYMENT
EXCELLENCE**

**BC Work Integrated Social Enterprises Project
Final Report**

July 2022

The BC Centre for Employment Excellence (CfEE) was established in 2012 to meet the knowledge and research needs of the employment services sector and the employer community in BC on issues related to employment programs and practices. The CfEE is a division of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, an established national non-profit, non-partisan, social policy research organization.

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Table of contents

Overview	1
Design of the BC WISE Study	2
WISE Participant Profile	10
Follow-up Survey Response Rates	14
Participant Outcomes at Year 3	15
From Learning Community to BC SE Network	25
Insights and Perspectives of WISE Partners	28
Final Conclusions and Lessons for Future Research	32
Appendix A: Year 3 Survey Results Tables	34
Appendix B: Profiles of BC WISE Partners	38
Appendix C: WISE Partner Focus & Recruitment	43
Appendix D: BC Social Enterprise Network Terms of Reference	44

Overview

This report presents the background, design, and final findings of the British Columbia (BC) Work Integrated Social Enterprises (WISE) project, a five-year research study that examined the long-term outcomes of training and employment interventions of work integrated social enterprises (WISEs) that have a social mission to job seekers facing barriers to employment in BC. The research study was led by the BC Centre for Employment Excellence (CfEE), a division of the national non-profit Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, with support from BC-based social enterprise consultant Rupert Downing. Mr. Downing’s primary role was to identify and engage the six WISE partners that are organized in two clusters in Abbotsford and Hazelton, BC, and to bring together and facilitate the Learning Community that provided input and advice on the research findings, as well as share out best practices and findings from the project in support of the broader WISE sector across the province.

This report provides a final overview of the project, including a description of how it was designed to address its key research questions. It highlights the final findings that were gathered through three years of data collection with participants and the organizations that trained or employed them. We also discuss the impact and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has greatly affected the operations of our WISE partners, as well as the personal health, well-being, and livelihoods of the participants. The report concludes with a description of the next steps for the project’s Learning Community (renamed the BC Social Enterprise Network) as well as concluding insights shared by the project’s WISE partners on the value of participating in this research as well as the challenges and opportunities facing their organizations.

Design of the BC WISE Study

Objectives for the Research Project

This study was conceptualized to provide much-needed evidence on the role of WISE interventions in supporting specific populations of job seekers with barriers to employment. It was motivated by the desire to examine what factors need to be in place for WISEs to support their target population as well as the long-term benefits to participants who participate in the WISE training and work experience opportunities.

The project was informed by approaches, methodologies, and lessons learned from previous research by the CfEE and other researchers on BC social enterprises — and WISEs in particular — that found a lack of knowledge and understanding of the unique role that WISEs play in supporting their local communities and key populations whom they train and employ. More specifically, there was a lack of evidence on the longer-term outcomes that WISE interventions generate for job seekers who face significant barriers to employment, especially among youth, newcomers, Indigenous populations, and people with disabilities.

The research project was guided by the following objectives:

- To evaluate the role that a sample of BC-based WISEs have in supporting the long-term employment outcomes of vulnerable job seekers through offering relevant work experiences, formal and informal employability skills training, and one-on-one client-centered employment services that will build their work experience portfolio and contribute to their employability skills, placing them in a better position to secure long-term employment.
- To understand how WISEs are connected to other employment service agencies or other community supports that can provide referrals as well as other employment-related case-managed supports and services.
- To create a Learning Community of practitioners, sector experts, and policy makers to engage in discussions about the findings and lessons learned from the project and to explore topics concerning the current barriers to scaling up the sector and supporting WISE capacity to employ job seekers with barriers to employment.

The core component of the research study was the longitudinal study of job seekers who had been newly engaged to participate in WISE training or employment interventions. The objective of the study was to engage the participants who had been recruited by the project's WISE partners and follow them over a three-year period to understand the role that the skills and experiences they have developed from their training or work experience played in their longer-term employment journeys. To achieve these objectives, the project worked with six BC WISEs that focused on providing supported training and/or employment opportunities for job seekers from pre-identified sub-groups of job seekers who are ready to participate in the labour force, but who face one or more significant barriers to employment, including language barriers, lack of

Canadian workplace experience, mental health or other disabilities, or personal or life circumstances that prevent the job seeker from finding and/or maintaining employment.

Research Design

As has been described in the project’s design and interim reports, this project’s research design and methodology stemmed from the earlier demonstration project involving youth-focused work integration social enterprises. In response to the Call for Proposals issued by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the CfEE team worked with BC-based social enterprise consultant Rupert Downing to develop a model that would work with a diversity of WISEs to track the long-term outcomes of trainees or employees as they begin their role or participation with the organization. While the team recognized that this approach of working only with participants who have already connected to the WISE would preclude the use of an experimental design to assess WISE impacts, it was decided that this would be a more appropriate design for working with smaller-scale WISEs to engage participants in the research study who were committed to completing their WISE interventions, which could include training, employment, or a mix of both.

After an initial scan of the current WISE sector conducted by Mr. Downing, the project team decided that a cluster design would provide an opportunity to engage groups of smaller enterprises that are co-located in a smaller community and have experience working together in a collaborative fashion, with each organization providing a unique yet complementary role in serving community needs. The team believed that this approach would facilitate the inclusion of smaller WISEs that are often overlooked in this type of research — particularly organizations that are working in more remote and/or rural communities — by providing opportunities to examine their collective impact through the aggregation of their outcomes data. The cluster approach to analyzing WISE outcomes would also mitigate challenges with respect to privacy and confidentiality in situations where individual WISEs only recruit a few trainees or employees at a time.

With this approach in mind, the team decided to focus on WISEs in two communities in BC that have not received a lot of attention in previous research. The social enterprises would be involved in a cluster fashion as essentially two separate case studies that are designed to provide important insights into how various WISE models can work together in a collaborative and complementary fashion.

A challenge for a research study examining a collection of WISEs and their participant outcomes is that each social enterprise is unique in terms of its social mission, business model, and the type of employment experience and/or training opportunities it offers its participants. To this end, the choice to use a cluster design was made to provide an opportunity to compare and contrast different approaches in urban and rural settings to supporting the workforce integration of community members who can benefit from WISE training and/or employment opportunities. Each WISE partner that agreed to participate in the study would engage new employees or trainees to join a longitudinal study where their outcomes would be captured for up to

three years, regardless of whether they remained with the WISE over the entire follow-up period. The research outcomes study would focus on the employment journeys of research participants, with the opportunity to examine other outcomes that are relevant to the WISEs, their participants, and the communities they support.

Evaluation Questions and Methods

As detailed in the project's interim reporting, this project was designed to address three key research questions that seek to better understand the unique role of WISEs in supporting a diversity of populations of job seekers with barriers to employment within the context of the broader employment delivery system. The study was focused on highlighting a range of WISE models, with the objective of deriving broader insights into how these models were developed in response to particular community needs, how they have been sustained by their host organizations and communities, and what might be required to support the further development of the WISE sector to increase its reach and impact.

The 2021 interim report discussed in greater detail the results of a sector scan and series of interviews with WISE leaders and stakeholders to address the project's first research question:

Question 1: What supports do WISEs need to hire vulnerable populations in a sustainable fashion?

Further insight into this question arose through ongoing conversations and observations of the WISE partners through the ongoing case studies, as well as discussions within the project's Learning Community concerning the business development needs of the WISE sector to expand their business capacity to hire populations whom they have a mission to support.

The second key research question was based on the funders' interest in the long-term employment-related outcomes of job seekers who receive training or employment experiences as part of a WISE intervention:

Question 2: What are the long-term employment outcomes for individuals who participate in WISE placements?

To address this research question, the project's research team co-created a common framework with the WISE partners by which participant outcomes could be evaluated across the six WISE organizations, providing a point of comparison in the relative effectiveness of different approaches to supporting employees from vulnerable populations. While this component of the research did not employ a true counterfactual, the project team used consistent measures across all organizations to compare the outcomes of different groups of participants working in different WISE settings. The main source of data for the participant outcomes research was a series of surveys that participants completed at enrolment in the study and at different points of follow-up over the three-year tracking period.

The third key question was the focal point for the creation of the Learning Community to build on the partnerships developed through the project to engage in broader discussions with sector

practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders to identify potential policy measures and sector-wide approaches that could help scale up and enhance the impact of WISEs in the BC and Canadian labour markets:

Question 3: What sector supports and capacity building are needed to scale up and improve outcomes among WISEs? What policy measures could improve the scale and impact of WISEs in BC?

By bringing together a diverse group of project partners and stakeholders on a quarterly basis to discuss current challenges and opportunities facing individual WISEs and the broader sector, the project team expected further initiatives and partnerships to emerge that could begin to address the gaps in knowledge, practice, and WISE business supports identified by the group. The hope was that the Learning Community could build momentum over the project's five years of operations to develop into a sustainable model that would continue after the conclusion of project activities. Given the objectives of the project, the Learning Community was intended from the outset to focus on the needs of the BC WISE sector, but the expectation was that Mr. Downing would regularly invite representatives from outside the province to join in the discussions to share experiences and examples from other jurisdictions in Canada.

Engaging WISE Partners

In order to identify appropriate partners and case study sites at the outset of the project, Mr. Downing led a scan of surveys on the BC social enterprise sector and also consulted with provincial social enterprise leaders and sector experts to identify WISEs that had both the social mission and capacity to support job seekers in their communities who are facing barriers to employment. The original objective of this phase was to establish agreements with three WISEs that have the capacity and commitment to provide employment training and work experiences for at minimum 45 participants. Given that the research parameters required participants to be followed for at minimum three years, potential partners were assessed in terms of their ability to recruit and engage new participants to their organizations and offer them a WISE intervention involving a mix of training and employment over a one-year recruitment period.

As discussed in the project's previous reports, Mr. Downing originally facilitated partnerships with three WISE organizations in Abbotsford, BC, that serve people with disabilities and newcomers, among other diverse populations facing barriers to employment. These enterprises included Archway Community Services (formerly Abbotsford Community Services), Communitas, and MCC Community Enterprises. The three organizations all had a strong history of engaging a diverse array of job seekers facing barriers to employment in a variety of WISE work experiences in a number of different sectors, including interpretation services, recycling, landscaping, food services, and landscaping.

Through Mr. Downing's ongoing engagement efforts with the sector, the project team was presented with an opportunity to engage a further group of small WISE organizations operating in Hazelton, which is located along the Yellowhead Highway 16 in northwest British Columbia.

The Village of Hazelton is a historic small village that is located in an area that includes the larger municipality of the District of New Hazelton, three unincorporated settlements (South Hazelton, Two Mile, and the Kispiox Valley), and four First Nations (three who are the Gitksan people [Gitanmaax, Glen Vowell, and Kispiox] and one who are the Wet'suwet'en people [Hagwilget]). The project team was very interested in the possibility of adding three WISE organizations with a mission to address the unique challenges and opportunities within a rural context to complement the urban focus of the Abbotsford-based WISEs. The new Hazelton partners would also present an opportunity to partner with a First Nations-led organization, as well as involve participants from the local First Nations. These discussions led to three WISEs in Hazelton agreeing to join the study, including Storytellers' Foundation, which operates a commercial catering and food preparation program called YouthWorks; Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre (an initiative of the Upper Skeena Development Centre); and the Gitanmaax Development Corporation, which operates the Indigenous-owned and staffed Gitanmaax Market and Gas Bar.

The next step in the engagement process involved in-person interviews with each of the WISEs to understand their business models and determine how the research could align with their organizational needs and operations. Given the smaller size and interconnected nature of the Hazelton-based WISEs, the project team decided that a cluster-based approach would be more appropriate to capturing their participant outcomes and impact within their community by pooling outcomes to protect organizational and individual participant privacy and confidentiality. This decision led to an overall shift in focus for the research to become an examination of two clusters of WISEs—one rural and one urban—that would allow for the inclusion of a greater diversity of WISEs in terms of their local contexts, social missions, and target populations.

Participant Research Instruments

The primary focus of the project's participant outcome analysis was a series of surveys of individuals who participated in training or employment WISE interventions. In keeping with the project's participatory approach, the research team consulted with partners about their experiences and expectations for the data collection process, and then drafted a survey tool to share with the partners for feedback. The motivation for integrating the partners' input and feedback into the survey was to improve its relevance for the individuals participating in WISE interventions and support the development of the WISE partners' evaluation capacity, which was a key expected outcome of the study. As a result of this shared effort to develop the survey tool, it was expected that the study findings related to the outcomes of the WISE trainees and/or employees would be of use to each WISE partner as well as generate a better understanding of the outcomes of the broader WISE sector.

Immediately after the project team finalized the WISE partners that would be supporting participant recruitment, the research team prepared an evaluation plan that included a draft of an intake survey to present to the six WISE partners. The baseline survey was developed to capture the project's key outcomes as well as other areas of interest identified through

discussions with the WISEs during the partner engagement process. The survey included questions for participants that were grouped in the following domains:

- **Basic demographics:** e.g., contact information (primary and secondary), age, gender, marital status, immigration history, citizenship status, and Indigenous identity.
- **WISE participation:** e.g., when did they start their training or employment at the WISE, the training or employment opportunity they are participating in, how they became involved with the WISE, and whether they are participating in any other training outside of the WISE.
- **Employment history:** e.g., what is their previous employment experience and current employment status, what barriers and challenges have they faced trying to obtain work, and what (if anything) has prevented them from finding work over the prior 12 months.
- **Earnings:** e.g., what are their current income sources, their current level of financial stress, and their ability to pay for their living expenses.
- **Housing:** e.g., what is their current housing situation, whether their housing situation has changed over the past six months, how they feel about their housing situation, whether it is affordable, and what worries they have about their housing situation if they have any worries at all.
- **Education and training:** e.g., what level of training and education have they completed and do they have plans to complete more training or education in the future.
- **Career adaptability:** e.g., what is their outlook and mindset concerning their career decision-making self-efficacy, their job search self-efficacy, their job search clarity, and any barriers to employment that they may face.
- **Community participation, networks and well-being:** e.g., questions about their participation in activities of daily living, the size and density of their social network, the impacts of health-related issues (including physical and mental health) on their employment situation, and their overall life satisfaction.

The project's follow-up surveys followed a similar line of inquiry to the baseline survey with small adjustments made in each based on response rate analysis as well as emerging issues that were raised in the project's other research activities and discussions with partners. Each year, in preparation for the data collection, the research team consulted the WISE partners to adjust the next survey wave to account for any new issues that may have arisen in their communities. These changes typically only involved adding or removing questions where the members agreed that such changes were necessary to ensure the surveys were as relevant as possible to participants' experiences. The research team was also mindful to keep the surveys as consistent as possible to support the longitudinal nature of the study.

For the two-year follow-up survey, the partners agreed to make adjustments to account for how the survey would have to be administered completely remotely due to newly introduced restrictions on in-person activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research team also drafted questions to capture participants' experiences with systemic racism, which partners agreed would be relevant given the high proportion of Indigenous people in the participant sample. The findings from these questions are included in the project's 2021 interim report. The

three-year survey was again adjusted to add questions regarding participants' personal challenges during the pandemic, as well as their perspectives on how the skills and experience they gained at the WISE contributed to their resiliency when encountering setbacks or other hardships in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Participant Recruitment Strategy

After finalizing the baseline survey, the research team worked with staff members at each of the participating WISEs to invite new trainees or employees to participate in the study. For the purpose of this project, a new trainee or employee was defined as someone who had been participating in WISE activities for less than a month. Invited individuals were made aware that they would be expected to complete a consent form; an intake (baseline) survey using an online platform, to be completed either independently or with the support of a WISE staff person or project researcher; as well as follow-up surveys for three years.

By limiting recruitment to new trainees or employees, the project was able to provide an assessment of participants before and after their training and/or employment at the WISE in order to measure changes to their social and economic outcomes for up to three years. To compensate participants for their time, they were initially offered one hour's wages or the equivalent honorarium for the first survey and provided with further compensation for completing all subsequent survey waves in the form of a gift card of their choosing. The gift cards involved a selection of options from a variety of local restaurants and retailers, including the Gitanmaax Market for participants who lived in Hazelton.

Project researchers also assisted with study recruitment and data collection at several of the WISEs that had limited staff capacity to support trainees or employees facing technical or literacy challenges that would otherwise prevent them from independently completing the survey. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this assistance included travelling to the WISEs to meet with the trainees or employees about the study and to conduct one-on-one survey interviews with those trainees or employees interested in participating in the study. These additional efforts were undertaken in order to ensure that the project was able to reflect the diverse range of individuals employed at WISEs and that the study was inclusive of organizations that may otherwise face capacity issues that would limit their participation.

Impact of COVID-19

As was discussed in the 2021 interim report, the economic shutdown by the BC provincial health authorities due to the of COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 had a dramatic impact on several of the project's WISE partners as well as a large number of participants. The report detailed how some partners — particularly those in Hazelton — had to shut down their training or business operations either temporarily or permanently, while partners reported that many participants disengaged from WISE or other employment-related activities, with a number of First Nations in the Hazelton area (as occurred elsewhere in BC) taking protective isolation measures, minimizing personal or other forms of outside contact to safeguard their communities.

The project team met with ESDC and the other WISE research teams in early 2020 to share how each project was managing through the shutdowns necessitated by the pandemic as well as discuss implications for the research. Through these discussions, the teams agreed with ESDC to continue research activities, with the understanding that the pandemic would present ongoing challenges for research and data collection activities — particularly with partners and participants who are vulnerable and/or live in remote communities where in-person connections are critical for maintaining relationships and engagement in the research studies.

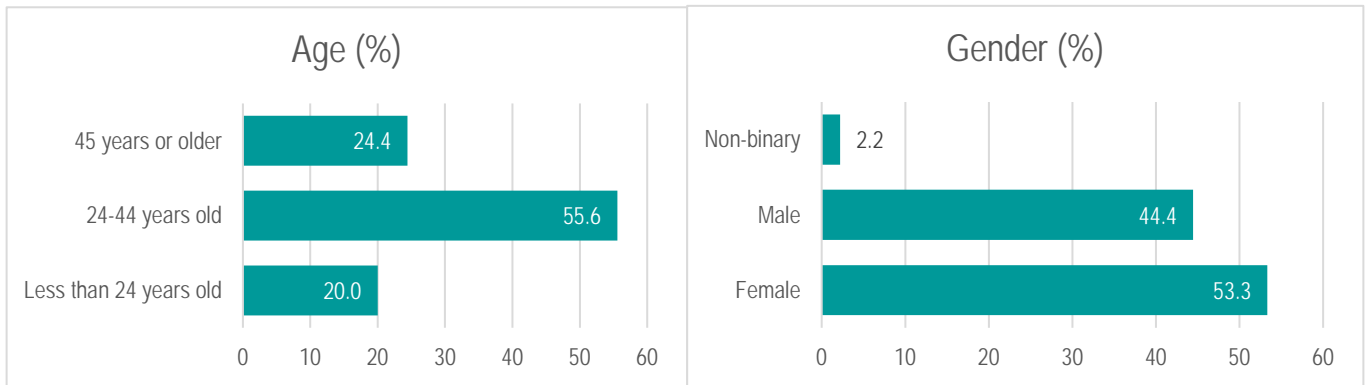
As will be discussed further below, the pandemic proved to have a lasting effect on the project team's ability to maintain connections with partners and participants in the Hazelton area in particular. Due to both staff turnover and limited communications during the pandemic, the team was unfortunately unable to regain a connection with the leadership team of the Gitanmaax Market. While a few participants who were recruited through the Market and the Senden farm did continue to participate in follow-up surveys, the team was unable to reconnect with most of the participants in Hazelton, despite the support we received from our other Hazelton partners to find alternative approaches to contacting them.

The loss of contact with a significant proportion of participants due to the pandemic meant that the final two follow-up surveys were unable to fully capture the experiences of participants who may have disengaged from their WISEs or other employment due to personal or community reasons. The team had planned to travel to the Hazelton area in the last year of the project to work with the WISE partners to trace participants for the year-three survey; however, these plans were ultimately thwarted by the need to respect both provincial mandates and local restrictions in the Hazelton area due to recurring outbreaks of the COVID-19 variants.

WISE Participant Profile

With the support of the WISE partners, the project recruited 45 employees or trainees to participate in the research study—19 in Hazelton and 16 in Abbotsford. An overview of the participants who were recruited for the study are provided below.

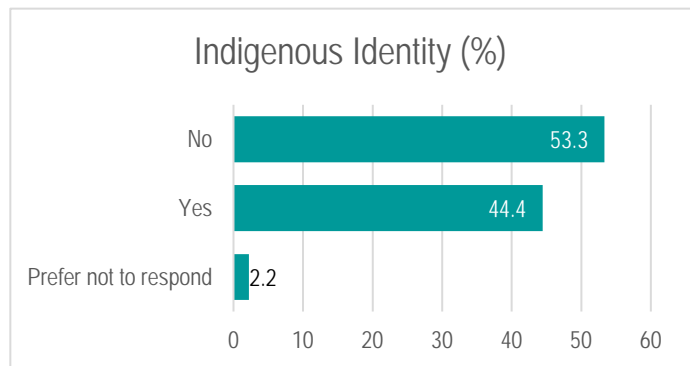
The age of BC WISE participants was divided into three age categories: less than 24 years old, 20-44 years old, and 45 years or older.

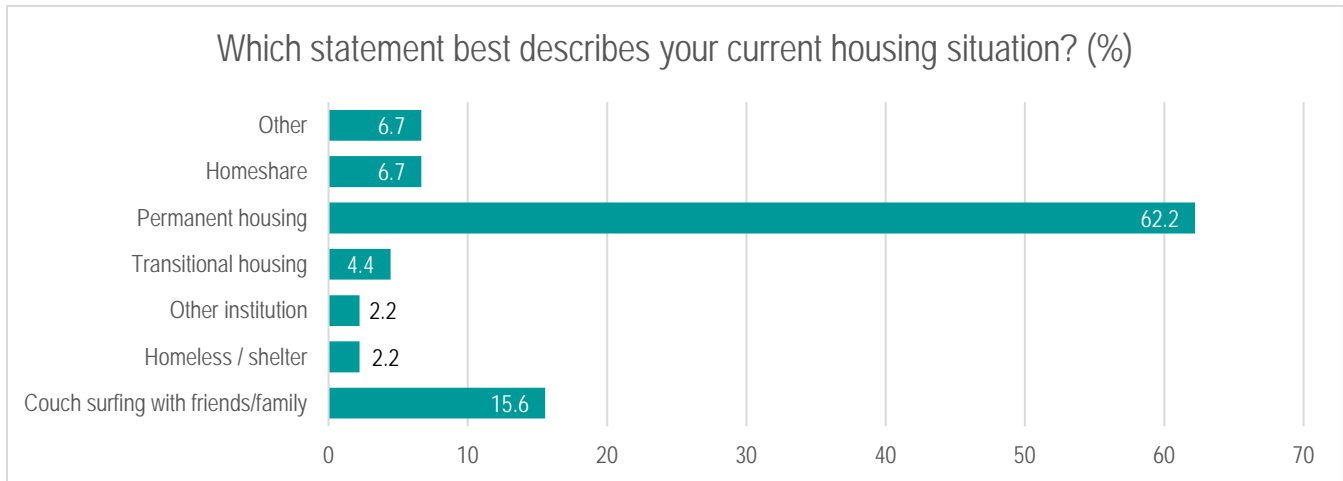


The majority of participants (55.6 per cent) were aged 24-44 at recruitment. The majority (53.3 per cent) of participants also identified as being female.

As noted previously, Hazelton is home to four First Nations, and the three partners in the Hazelton cluster recruited a large representation of Indigenous participants from their community, leading to 44.4 per cent of the entire participant group self-identifying as having Indigenous identity.

The baseline survey revealed that participants were living in diverse housing situations. While nearly two-thirds (62.2 per cent) of participants reported that they were living in permanent housing, the other third reported living in what could be described as precarious housing, with 15.6 per cent of participants reporting that they were couch surfing and 4.4 per cent reporting that they were living in transitional housing.

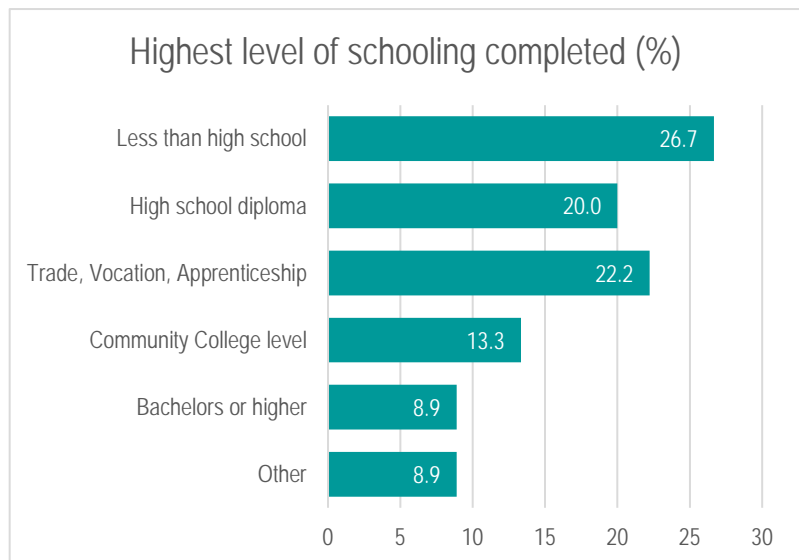


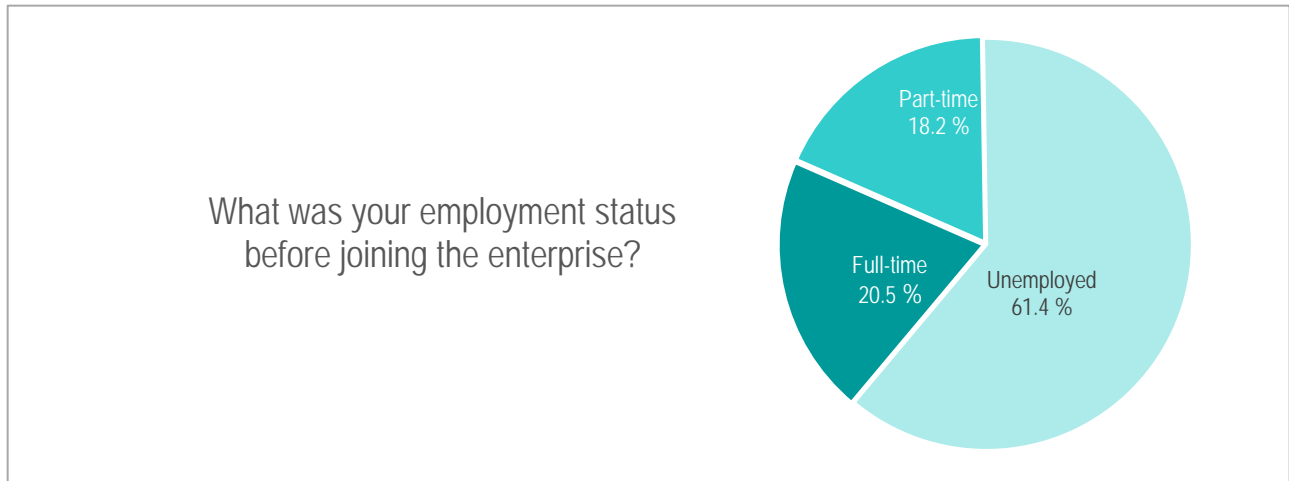


When asked how they felt about their housing situation (figures not shown), just over half (52.3 per cent) of participants indicated that they were either sometimes worried (49.9 per cent) or always worried (11.4 per cent), which indicates that finding or maintaining stable housing was of considerable concern to most participants at the time that they enrolled in the study.

Participants varied in their education achievement, with over a quarter (26.7 per cent) reporting that they had not achieved a high school diploma (or equivalent). One-fifth (20.0 per cent) of participants completed high school but did not pursue post-secondary education, and 22.2 per cent completed a trade or vocational apprenticeship. Among participants who had pursued further post-secondary education, the largest proportion had pursued community college education.

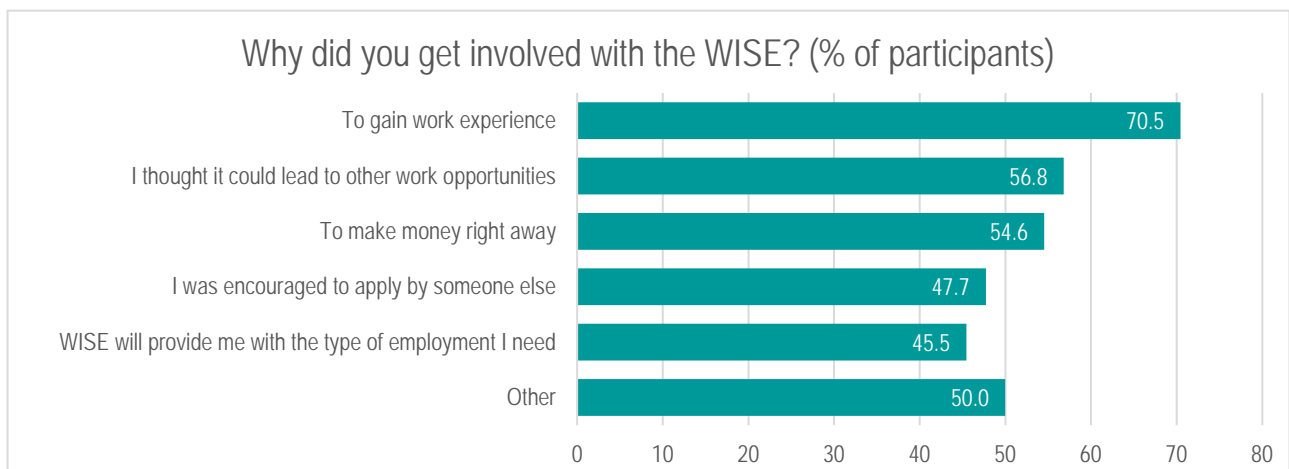
When asked about their employment situation prior to joining the WISE, nearly two-thirds (61.4 per cent) of participants reported that they were unemployed. Among those who were working, just over half were working full-time.



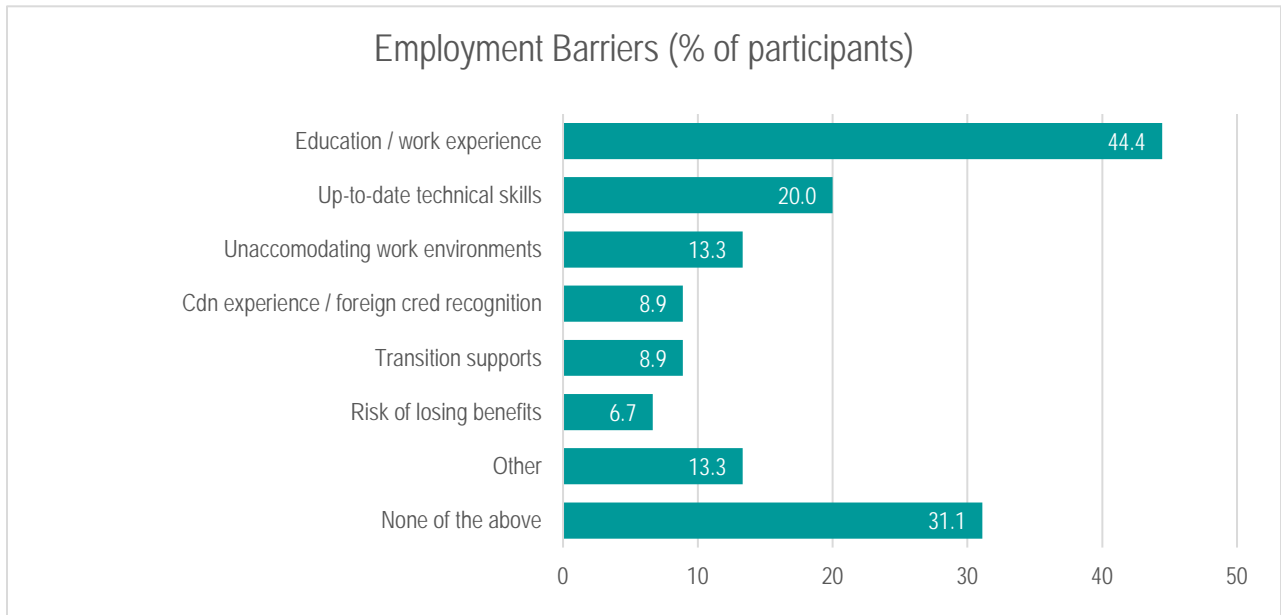


Among participants who were unemployed prior to joining the WISE (not shown), just over half (51.9 per cent) reported that their jobless period was shorter than 12 months. One-quarter (25.9 per cent) of participants were unemployed for more than one year. A large number of participants (22.2 per cent) indicated that they have never had paid employment prior to their participation in the WISE, which undoubtedly reflects the large proportion of youth participants and people with disabilities whose new WISE position may have been their first entry point into the labour market.

When asked why they engaged with the WISE, participants were most likely to indicate that it represented an opportunity to gain work experience (70.5 per cent). The second most common reason was the opportunity to pursue further work opportunities (56.8 per cent), while just over half (54.6 per cent) indicated that they were working at the WISE to make money right away. Despite the fact that some of the WISE partners were focused on transitional training or employment, nearly half (45.5 per cent) of participants reported that they were working at the WISE as it provided them with the type of employment they needed.



Participants were likely to indicate that they faced a number of barriers when asked about the challenges they faced when pursuing employment. Educational attainment was the most selected barrier by participants (44.4 per cent), with other barriers such as lacking up-to-date skills and unaccommodating work environments as the next most likely to be selected. Nearly one-third (31.1 per cent) of participants indicated that they did not face any of the barriers identified in the list.



Follow-up Survey Response Rates

Participants were invited to complete their first follow-up survey at the end of their WISE intervention, or approximately six months from when they signed up for the research study if they had remained continuously employed by the WISE over the period. The remaining surveys were completed on an annual basis. To facilitate completions, each survey wave included opportunities for participants to provide updated contact information. The research team also worked with the WISE partners to support engagement of any participants with whom the researchers had lost contact.

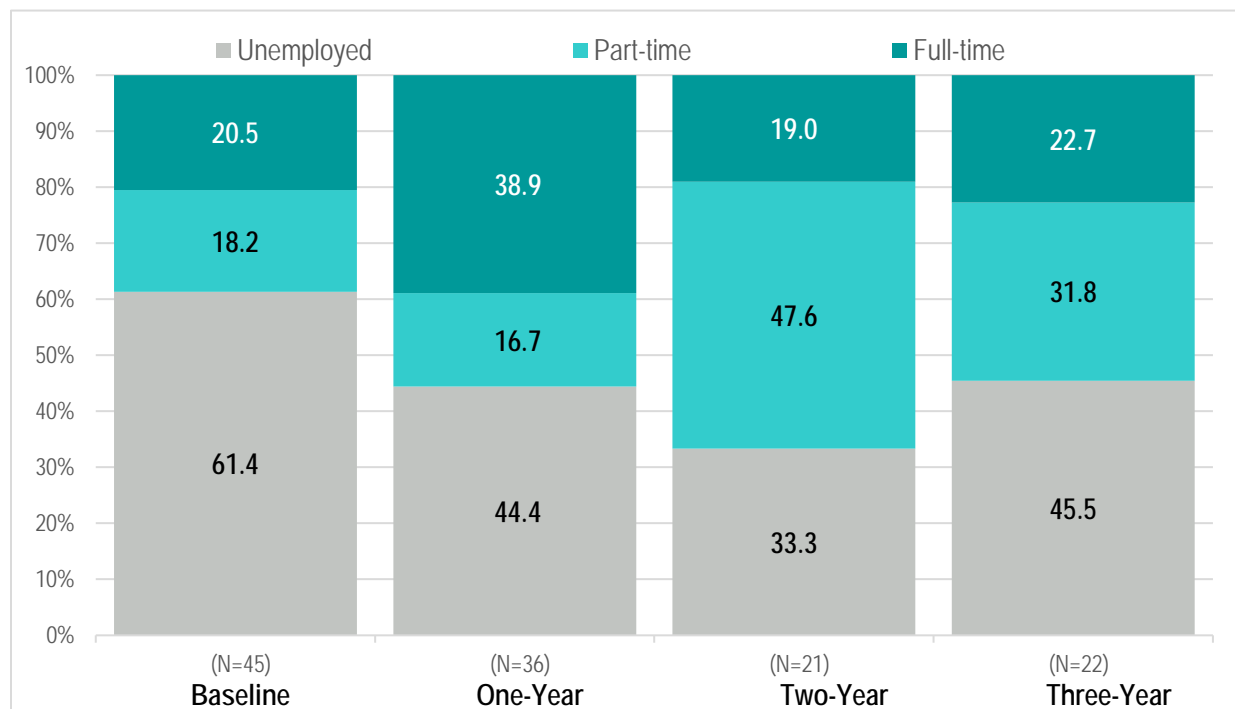
The one-year post-intervention survey was completed by 36 participants, for a response rate of 80 per cent. The two-year post-intervention survey was completed by 21 participants, for a response rate of 47 per cent. The three-year survey was completed by 22 participants, for a response rate of 49 per cent of the total participant group. It is notable that the two-year and three-year surveys were administered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the challenge of connecting with participants and/or their willingness to complete the survey. The response rates for the final two surveys also reflect the challenges in maintaining connections with participants who are no longer involved with their WISE employer and whose circumstances can change from year to year.

Participant Outcomes at Year 3

The following section presents the findings from the three-year survey. The full tables of results are provided in Appendix A. Due to low response rates among the Hazelton cluster (Abbotsford: n=19; Hazelton: n=3), the survey data had to be pooled across both sites.

Employment

The following figure illustrates the changes in employment rates for WISE participants from intake (baseline) and at each annual follow-up. Given that the two- and three-year results represent employment outcomes among fewer than half of the full sample of participants who enrolled in the study, they are presented with caution and should be considered indicative — not definitive — of overall participant employment outcomes.

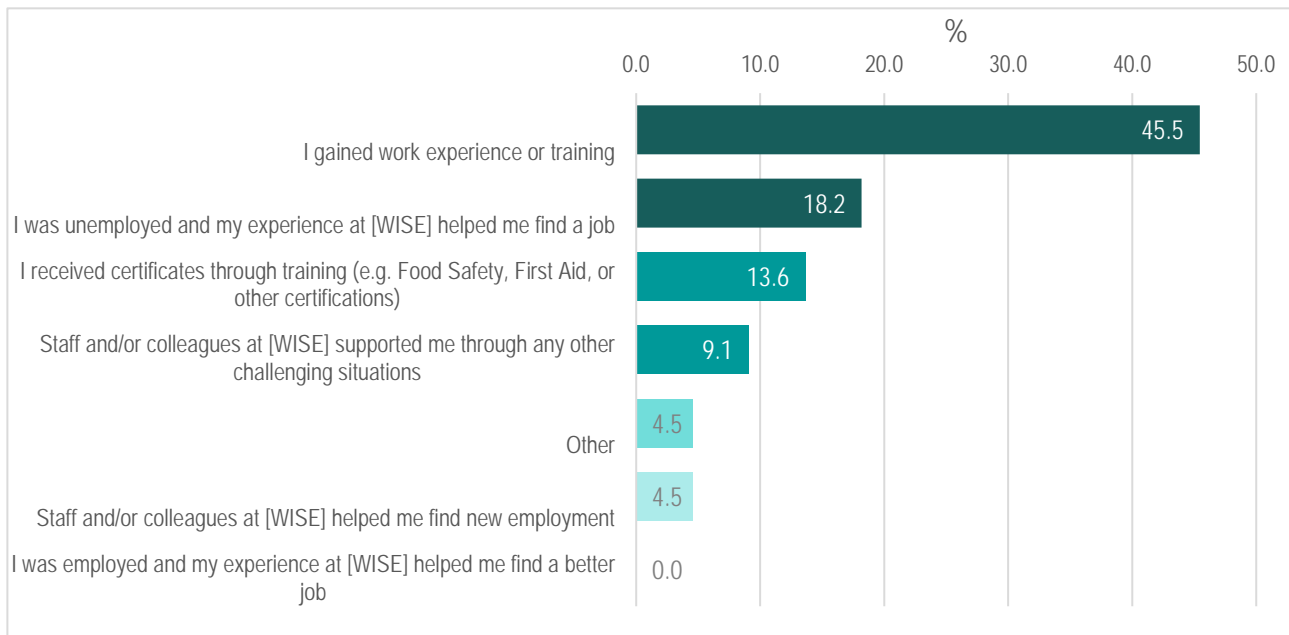


The chart illustrates how participants made large employment gains from the intake to the one-year follow-up survey, with well over half (55.6 per cent) of participants reporting that they were employed, with the largest proportion working in full-time positions. The figure illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemic, as captured in the two-year and three-year follow-up surveys, mostly affected the proportion of respondents who were working full-or part-time.

Given that the survey was completed by participants who had remained in some form of contact with the WISE or the project team, it was not surprising that the pandemic did not have as large

an impact on year-two survey respondents as had been shared anecdotally with the project team by the WISE partners. At the two-year follow-up, respondents continued to experience employment gains, although most of these gains were in part-time employment, with nearly half (47.6 per cent) of respondents reporting that they were working in part-time positions at the two-year mark. The year-three survey shows that respondents experienced a 12.2 percentage point increase in unemployment; however, they also made small gains in full-time employment. While there was a year-over-year increase in unemployment by the final follow-up survey, respondents continued to maintain overall employment gains from when they first engaged with the WISE.

When asked at the three-year mark about the impacts their WISE experience may have had on their employment, nearly half of participants (45.5 per cent) indicated that they gained work experience or training. Nearly one in five respondents (18.2 per cent) reported that their WISE experience had helped them find a job when they were unemployed. 13.6 per cent of respondents reported that they had been able to receive some form of certification through training at the WISE.



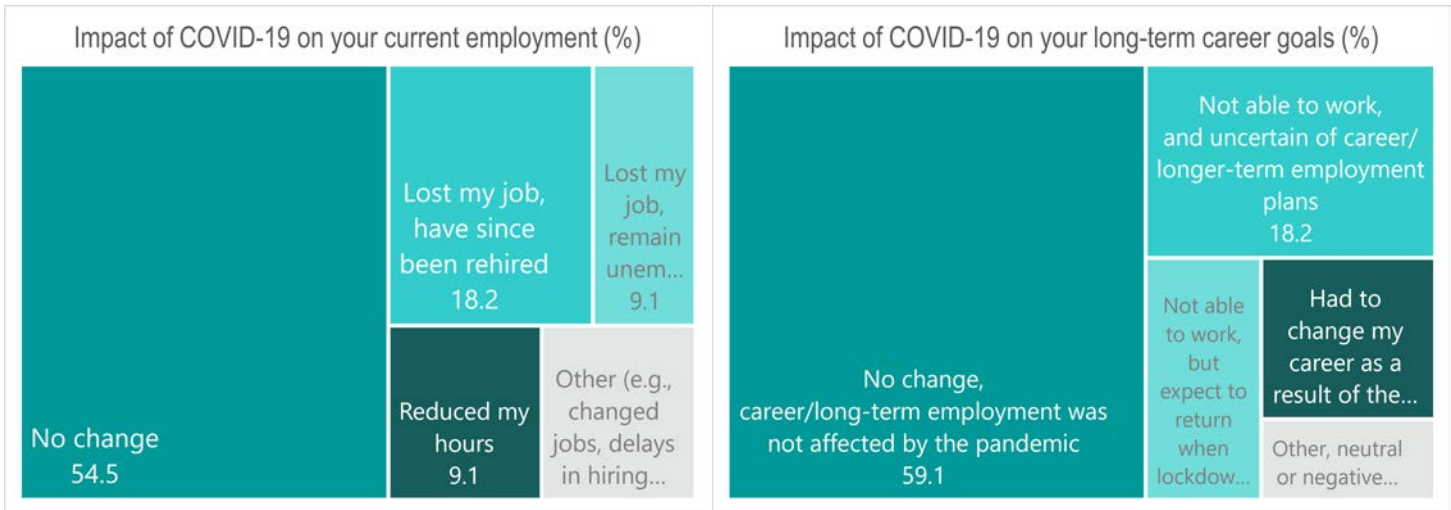
Just under a tenth of respondents (9.1 per cent) indicated that the WISE staff had helped them through other challenging situations. Keeping in mind that these results represent the average experience of respondents across a variety of WISE interventions, it is notable that such a large proportion of participants continue to attribute positive gains they have made back to the WISE three years later.

When asked about other impacts their WISE experience may have had on their lives more generally (not shown), nearly one-third of participants (31.8 per cent) reported increased self-esteem, and nearly one-quarter (27.3 per cent) indicated improved ability to deal with challenging situations. A smaller proportion of respondents indicated improved life satisfaction and physical/mental health (both 18.2 per cent). These self-reported impacts represent a decline from their levels at the two-year follow-up. Again, these declines may reflect the length of time since many respondents last engaged with the WISE. As will be discussed further in the next section, any impacts of the WISE intervention that persisted after three years could also have been outweighed by the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on respondents' employment situation or personal circumstances at the time when they completed the year-three survey.

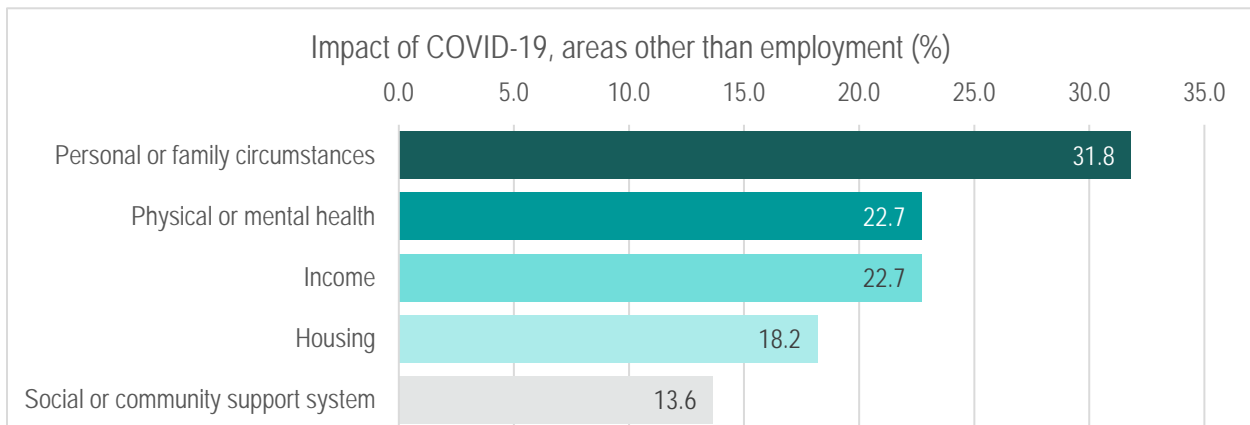
Impact of COVID-19 on Participant Outcomes

As noted above, respondents to the two-year survey actually reported an increase in employment in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, although there was a 15-percentage point year-over-year decline in the proportion who were working full-time from the year-one survey. Further follow-up questions confirmed that the pandemic was having a differential impact on the employment situation of participants who responded to the survey; nearly half reported no impact on their employment, one-fifth reported that they experienced reduced hours, one-tenth had lost their jobs and been rehired, and a similar proportion had lost their jobs and had not been re-employed at the time of completing the survey.

In the year-three survey we asked participants if COVID-19 was still impacting their lives. When asked about COVID-19 impact to their employment, a similar proportion of respondents (54.5 per cent) continued to report no change in their employment due to COVID-19, while a larger proportion than the year-two survey (18.2 per cent vs. 9.5 per cent) reported that they had lost their job due to the pandemic but had since been rehired. When asked about impacts of COVID-19 on any long-term career plans, the patterns were similar — most participants experienced no long-term changes to employment (59.1 per cent), nearly one-fifth (18.2 per cent) reported not being able to work, and a similar proportion indicated that they were uncertain of their longer-term career plans.



Respondents were invited to share how COVID-19 has affected them in other areas, and among the fifteen respondents who selected an area, nearly a third reported impacts on personal or family circumstances (31.8 per cent), followed by nearly a quarter who reported impacts on physical/mental health, with a similar proportion who indicated a negative impact on their income (both 22.7 per cent). This shows a general decrease in impacts of the pandemic from the previous year’s survey, where 40 to 50 per cent of participants reported impacts across a wide range of areas. One notable shift from the previous year was the decrease in respondents reporting impacts to their social or community support system, which decreased from half of participants to only 13.6 per cent of the three-year survey sample.

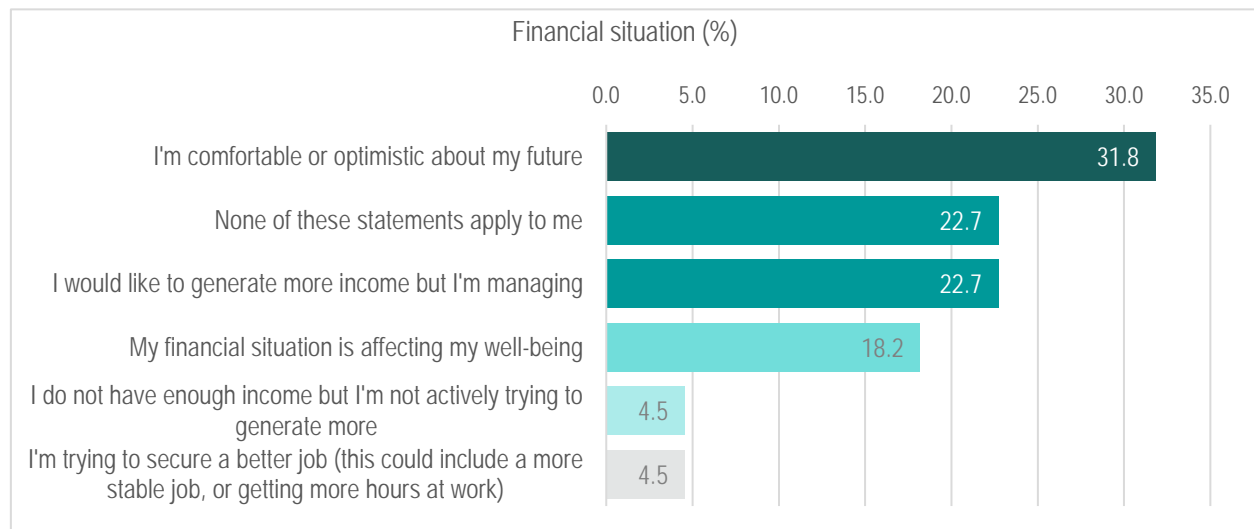


Thus, across multiple measures, the majority of respondents showed that COVID-19 was no longer impacting their employment in 2021, and much fewer participants reported impacts in other areas beyond employment, when compared to the previous year’s survey. These results indicate that, for at least the participants who participated in the final two annual surveys, most had started to bounce back in terms of employment and other areas of life by the end of the

follow-up period. However, this was not the case for all respondents, as one-fifth continued to be in a situation where they were struggling with uncertainty and longer-term career planning beyond the pandemic.

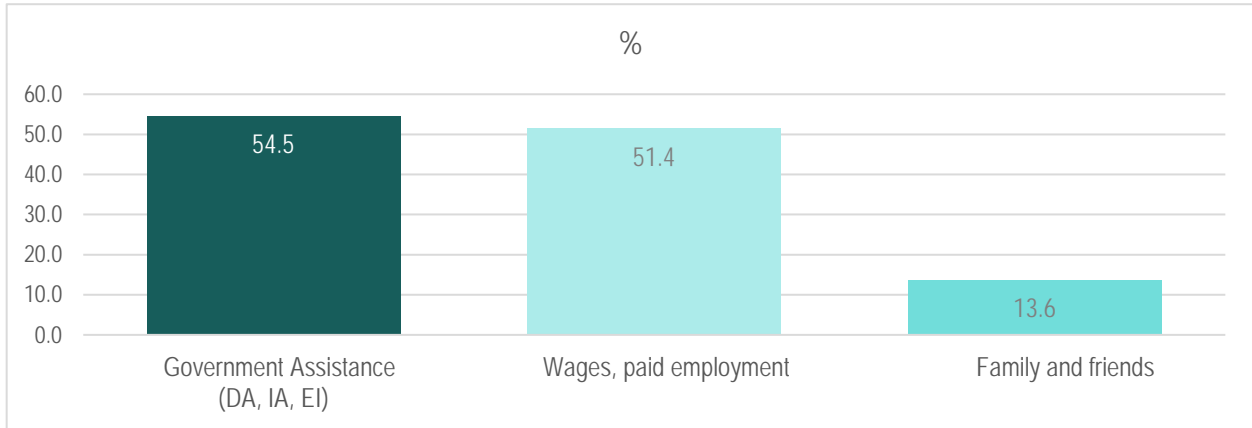
Financial Situation

Following on respondents' employment outcomes, respondents to the final follow-up survey were fairly positive about their financial situation and future. Nearly a third of respondents (31.8 per cent) indicated that they were comfortable and optimistic about their future, and nearly a quarter (22.7 per cent) indicated that none of the statements regarding a desire to improve their financial situation applied to them. A similar proportion of respondents indicated that they are managing but would like to generate more income.



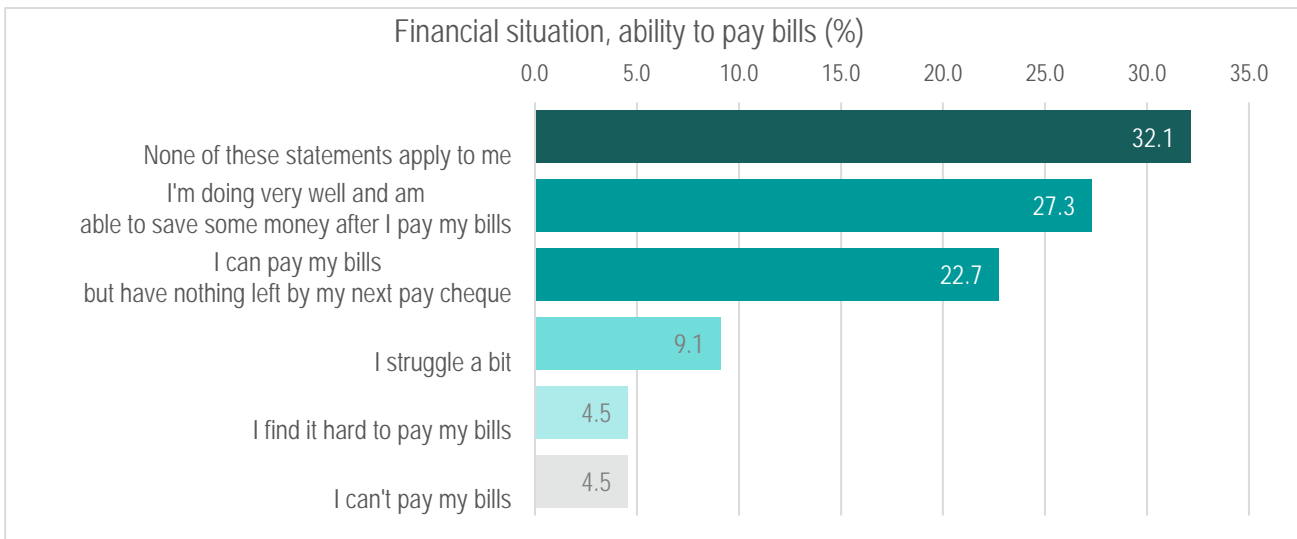
Similar to the employment results, a small but significant group of respondents (18.2 per cent) shared that their financial situation was affecting their well-being, and 4.5 per cent indicated that they do not earn enough income but they were not actively trying to generate more.

Respondents were asked to list their sources of income from as many sources as applicable. Most respondents reported receiving government assistance (54.5 per cent), including 27.3 per cent receiving disability assistance, 18.2 receiving income assistance, and 9.1 per cent receiving Employment Insurance. Just over half of the three-year sample (51.4 per cent) reporting receiving wages from the WISE or other employment, and a small proportion (13.6 per cent) were receiving help from family and friends.



Thus, it is not surprising that when asked about their level of financial stress, respondents reported moderate to low stress in the final follow-up survey, averaging only 4.7 out of a 10-point scale (not shown). These sources and stress levels replicated the patterns reported in the year-two survey.

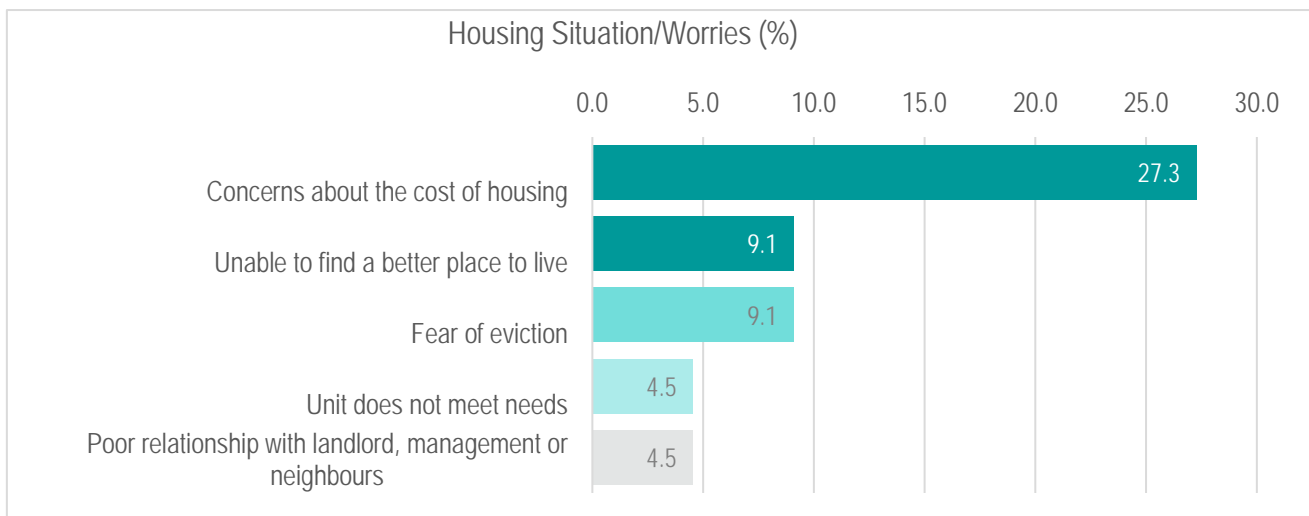
When asked about their ability to pay bills, half of respondents indicated that they were doing very well (27.3 per cent) or were able to at least manage paying their bills with nothing left over from their pay cheque (22.7 per cent).



Similar to the previous findings, a small but significant group indicated that they struggled a bit (9.1 per cent), that they find it hard to pay their bills (4.5 per cent) or that they are unable to pay their bills (4.5 per cent). It is notable that nearly a third of respondents (32.1 per cent) indicated that none of the statements applied to them. While it is not possible to know their rationale for selecting this option, one possible explanation is possibly linked to the previous finding that a

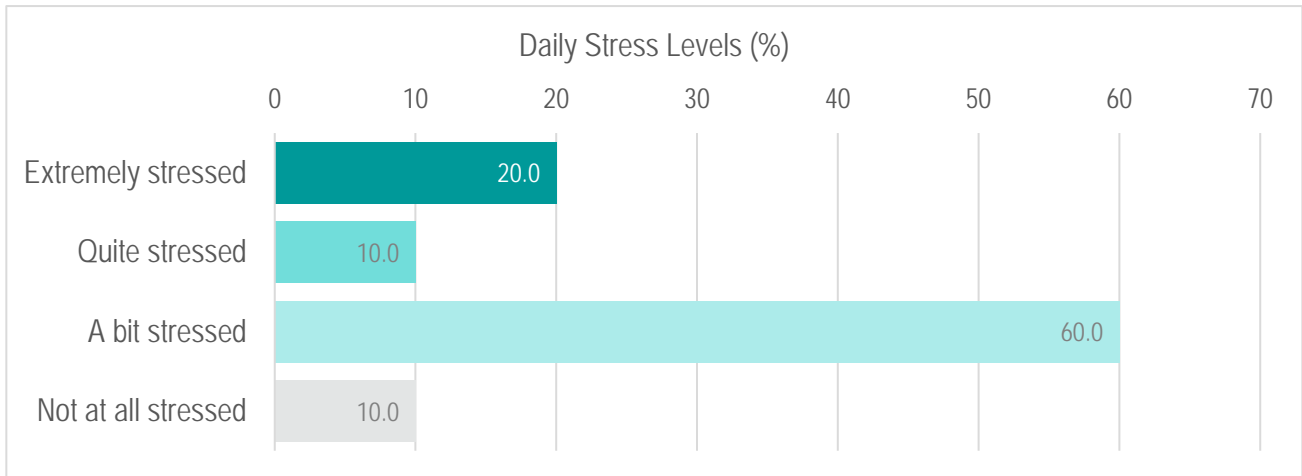
majority of respondents reported receiving government assistance as a source of income. For respondents who were receiving temporary government assistance at the time of completing the survey, they may have been in a situation where they currently have sufficient income but have some uncertainty as to how long that assistance may last, or what opportunities they may have to replace the income in the future.

As was noted with regards to participants’ housing situation at the time when they enrolled in the study, stable housing was of considerable concern to most participants when they joined the WISE. At the time of the three-year follow-up survey, respondents reported lower levels of concern with respect to their housing situation. However, over a quarter of respondents (27.3 per cent) reported being concerned about the cost of housing, while nearly one in ten respondents (9.1 per cent) reported being unable to find a better place to live, and a similar proportion indicated that they lived in fear of eviction.



Well-being and Resilience

Participants were asked additional questions about their well-being and ability to cope with challenges. Similar to the patterns around financial stress, respondents indicated that they were generally not overly stressed in their daily lives. Most participants reported being a bit stressed (60.0 per cent), with fewer feeling quite stressed (10.0 per cent) or extremely stressed (20.0 per cent) on a daily basis.



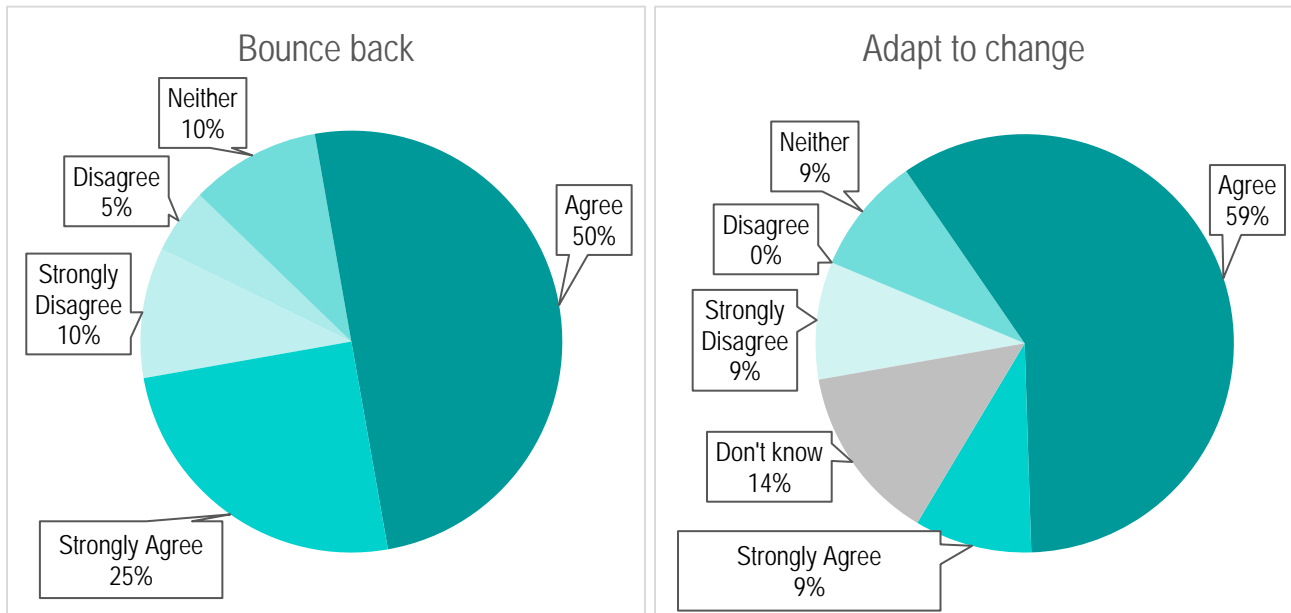
In general, respondents reported being satisfied with their lives as a whole. Using a life satisfaction scale from 1 to 10, nearly all respondents scored five or above (91.0 per cent), with nearly a third (31.8 per cent) giving themselves a 9 or 10 score, while another quarter (27.3 per cent) scored themselves at 7 or 8. Similarly, respondents generally reported that they were in good health, with all respondents reporting 5 or above on the scale (1 = poor, 10 = excellent). Over a third of respondents (36.8 per cent) scored their health at 9 or 10, and the same proportion self-rated their health at 7 or 8 on the scale.

Resilience

To better situate the participants' well-being and experience in the face of the global pandemic, two measures of resilience were added to the final follow-up survey. Given the potential for the COVID-19 pandemic to have a negative impact on the project's key outcomes of interest, the research team and partners were interested in learning more about respondents' ability to recover from any setbacks or challenges they experienced during the pandemic. Specifically, the research team was interested not only in participants' resilience in the face of a pandemic, but whether they would consider WISE experience as having played a role in supporting their ability to manage through any challenges or setbacks they may have experienced over the past two years. To identify this potential longer-term impact of the WISE, participants were asked to report on any resilience gained from their experience at the WISE and offered an open-ended question to share their experiences.

A large proportion of the three-year survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that their participation at the WISE helped them bounce back quickly after hard times (75.0 per cent), and only 15.0 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Most respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that their participation at the WISE helped them adapt to change

(68.2 per cent), whereas only 9.0 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was a connection between their WISE experience and their adaptability.



While these findings provide only a limited perspective on the role that the WISEs played in participants’ longer term employment experiences, they do suggest that for many participants — at least among those who continued to participate in the research study over its duration — the broad range of hard and soft skills they gained at the WISE had an impact on their resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges they have faced in the first two years of the pandemic. The following quotes are illustrative of the sentiments a limited number of respondents shared when asked to reflect on the impact that their WISE experience has continued to have in their employment journeys.

“After getting job at [WISE], I have worked at [another company], have become financially and career-wise more sound and secure.”

“Learned life skills and made friends.”

“The many triumphs and failures helped me realize that nothing stays the same and it’s easier to ‘go with the flow’ than fight the changes I have no control over.”

Summary of Participant Longitudinal Outcomes

Although a limited number of the original group of participants remained engaged in the research study for its duration of three years, the final follow-up survey provides some key insights into the longer-term journeys of this group of job seekers who had received a variety of WISE interventions to improve their employability skills and facilitate their connections to the labour market. The survey findings illustrate that, for this subset of participants who completed the final follow-up survey, a larger proportion of respondents were employed at the three-year follow-up than the full sample at the time when they enrolled in the study. Most respondents of the three-year survey reported gaining either employment experience or assistance finding a job through the WISE, which contributed to their employability skills and helped place them in a better position to secure long-term employment.

The majority of respondents also demonstrated that they were managing through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic fairly well, despite experiencing either short-lived or longer-term setbacks such as a loss of jobs or access to other social supports. Most respondents attributed their WISE experience as having played a role in contributing to their resiliency and adaptability in the face of such challenges, and a number of respondents shared how the WISE organization and staff not only provided them with assistance in their employment journeys, but also helped them develop other important life and social skills that contributed to their quality of life. Given that the study was aimed at understanding the role that WISEs can play in supporting the labour market journeys of job seekers with barriers to employment — at intake nearly 70 per cent of participants reported barriers to employment — these findings provide confirming evidence that WISE interventions can provide a unique and effective mix of training and supported employment for job seekers who would otherwise struggle to gain a foothold in the labour market.

Despite these overall positive findings from the participant longitudinal study, the findings of the final follow-up survey continue to demonstrate that a small but significant group of participants continue to experience challenges and stressors in a number of key areas. These outcomes of concern range from long-term employment plans being uncertain due to the COVID-19 pandemic, difficult financial situations continuing to affect their personal well-being, persistent worries about their housing and ability to pay their bills, and ongoing high levels of stress. While it is difficult to draw conclusions based on the small sample size of the final survey, these patterns suggest that it is important to pay attention to this subgroup of participants who could still benefit from additional supports after their participation at the WISE.

From Learning Community to BC SE Network

As discussed in previous project reports, the original research design included the establishment of a Learning Community of WISE partners and other social enterprise practitioners that would meet over the course of the study to support the project’s research activities and communications efforts, while facilitating capacity-building in the WISE sector in BC. The purpose of this Learning Community was not only to support the research, but also to connect with other aligned initiatives and generate valuable opportunities for WISE stakeholders to explore issues, ideas, and opportunities to address the broader challenges facing the sector across the province.

The Learning Community was convened by Mr. Downing with its membership consisting of project partners as well as other stakeholders who had supported the design and development of the project. The meetings were originally intended to be held online, with several in-person events to be organized later in the project to share out findings and discuss opportunities to extend or expand the role of the Learning Community beyond the project. Due to restrictions on in-person gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings were held online through the Zoom video conferencing platform.

In the first year of the project, Mr. Downing convened the first meetings of the Learning Community with a targeted group of WISE practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to share out the research project approach and findings, as well as begin discussions on the circumstances and challenges facing the WISE community in BC. The Learning Community, whose agenda and activities were co-created with participants on a quarterly basis, enabled the project’s research activities to address gaps in knowledge and practice as determined by its membership. Mr. Downing also invited several presenters from BC and other provinces to share information on other supports, tools, and resources that were available to WISEs to build their capacity to support employment opportunities to participants.

In the last year of the project, Mr. Downing led discussions with Learning Community members to expand the mandate of the Learning Community to transition it to a province-wide network of WISE organizations in BC that would continue meeting after the end of the project. The BC Centre for Social Enterprise agreed to continue to host the Network and its ongoing policy development activities, with a shared objective of scaling up the sector, building its capacity, and creating a more enabling policy environment. The Network’s initial Terms of Reference that were adopted by the membership in 2021 are included in Appendix D.

Over the final year of project operations, the Network planned and hosted a virtual BC Social Enterprise Gathering on April 29, 2022, bringing together approximately 40 practitioners and other stakeholders involved in social enterprises across BC. The aim of the gathering was to share models, practices, challenges, and solutions with the aim of creating a “social enterprise agenda” for BC that strengthens the movement and supports the capacity of its members to deliver on their social missions in their local communities. The gathering was also a forum to discuss plans for a larger Summit in Fall 2022, where sector representatives from across BC will

be able to gather with social enterprise experts and policy makers to discuss challenges and opportunities facing social enterprises, and WISEs in particular, at the community, regional, and provincial levels.

The half-day gathering of the BC Social Enterprise Network in April 2022 provided Network members with an opportunity to share out their experiences that have helped their enterprise succeed in such areas as securing funding or financing, developing HR capacity, identifying new business opportunities, and supporting the development of enabling policies for the social enterprise sector. Participants gathered in small groups to share their experiences and brainstorm further opportunities for the Network to support capacity development in each of these areas. Small group notes were captured using a virtual whiteboard where members could record thoughts and ideas that were then organized thematically to be shared in plenary with the larger group.

The following screen-capture of one group’s discussion on social enterprise employment and training approaches illustrates the ideas that were discussed during the gathering. It highlights how the group members shared areas where approaches or practices were working well within their WISEs, as well as areas where they were experiencing challenges in terms of their models, practices, and outcomes.

Group F

Group F - Employment and training approaches in SEs

[Back to main board](#)

- Introduce yourself and share why joined the break-out group
- For this topic area:
 - What have you experienced in this area that has helped your enterprise succeed?
 - What has not been helpful?
 - How can we move forward together to address these challenges and opportunities?

Being clear about the model (training vs. employment)

Allow people to test the waters before diving fully in

Model Development

What's worked well?

Inclusivity - people feel welcomed and a part of

Patience

Peer support

Meeting people where they are at.

Supportive Practices

Balance focus between general skills with specific skills

Funding Sources

Length of programming? Not enough time!

Model Challenges

Communication - the approach to working with people (breaking down barriers)

Breaking down the divide between management/trainers and the employees

Building Relationship

What's been challenging?

Challenges - work readiness and life skills needing support

Unclear expectations prevented success

People not showing up

Operations/Practices

Meeting quotas/customer demands

Balancing automation and keeping enough labor aspects to keep people working

Competition

Flexible projects that can accommodate persons with barriers

Intentional about standards and metrics

Be Strategic

Following the Gathering, the BC Social Enterprise Network met on June 22, 2022 to launch the next steps for the Network after the completion of this project. The purpose of this meeting was to review the Terms of Reference, establish priorities for future meetings, identify a group of volunteers to begin planning the BC Social Enterprise Summit to be held later in 2022, and explore opportunities for funding future Network research and sector engagement activities. Rupert Downing and the BC Centre for Social Enterprise will continue to provide leadership and coordination on behalf of the Network.

Insights and Perspectives of WISE Partners

The following section provides a series of insights from the WISE partners at the conclusion of the study. In the final months of the project, the research team reached out to the partners to participate in a final interview to share their experiences and perspectives after five years of partnering together on the research study. Four of the six project partners agreed to share their perspectives with the research team.¹

The work of the WISE partners highlights the variety of social missions and business models in the BC WISE sector. The majority of WISE partners trace their roots to filling a gap that exists in the labour market as well as recognizing the therapeutic value of the work in a time of transition or recovery, where work may represent a means toward achieving wellness or self-sufficiency rather than being the end goal. WISE partners shared that this aspect of their social mission was particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting all of the organizations that were able to continue operating one or more of their WISEs to find ways to maintain some form of position for their employees where they could continue to receive a steady income and remain connected to the organization.

Many WISEs have a mandate to work with populations who may face significant challenges to achieving full-time labour market attachment for years to come. In this study, for example, WISE partners are employing people with intellectual disabilities and other cognitive challenges, people who are in a stage of transition from experiences of homelessness or addiction, newcomers who are looking to gain Canadian work experience and possibly reengage with the careers they had before they arrived in Canada, and Indigenous youth who are seeking opportunities to (re)connect with their First Nation's culture and community, among others. With their organizations' social missions in mind, the WISE partners shared that providing secure employment is not necessarily the end goal but rather part of a larger process toward facilitating well-being for individuals who may have other long-term objectives beyond securing employment with a mainstream employer. The objectives of each WISE also varied based on the populations they served as well as the local labour market in which they were operating.

For the cluster of WISE partners in Hazelton, for instance, facilitating opportunities for full-time or even part-time labour market attachment for their participants beyond the WISE work experience has typically been challenging due to limited employment opportunities in this small community, which were only exacerbated by the pandemic. For the WISE partners in Abbotsford, the enterprises are struggling with increasing labour costs due to shortages in a very competitive

¹ Due to turnover among the WISE organizations, almost all of the WISE partners experienced a change of leadership and staff representation in the project. As a result, the representatives of two of the four partners who engaged in the final research interviews had limited knowledge and experience of the project's research activities and, as a result, limited their reflections to challenges and opportunities facing their WISEs as well as the ongoing needs of the populations communities that they serve.

labour market. While this situation is presenting new employment opportunities for the populations they serve, it is limiting the financial capability of the enterprise to provide the additional supports that job seekers who are at a greater distance from the labour market need to successfully transition and remain in the labour market.

The WISE partners reinforced in the interviews that their enterprises experience the same challenges and need for business knowledge and experience as other small businesses, while dealing with an added layer of commitment to their social missions that other small businesses do not have. The partners reflected on how relationships between program staff and employees are central to their operations as social enterprises. They discussed how it is important that those who are responsible for leading the business have the specific industry and business knowledge to operate a successful business, but also have the interpersonal knowledge and skillset to connect and build trusting relationships with the populations the WISE has a social mission to employ.

This means that in addition to being affected by specific market conditions and the broader economic environment, WISEs face the added challenge of finding and retaining senior staff to oversee their operations who have the qualifications and expertise to train and mentor diverse populations of job seekers with specific needs and barriers to employment. The research team noted that every WISE partner had some degree of senior staff turnover over the course of the five-year project, which led to a number of situations where organizations had to pause programming or business operations until they could find a suitable replacement to manage the WISE.

The partners shared that starting and managing a social enterprise takes the same level of care as starting any business, and opportunity or need alone will not produce success. The WISE partners shared how they constantly had to monitor local market conditions, advances made by their competitors, and/or technological innovations in their sector to ensure that they could maintain their market share and competitive advantage. One partner remarked that there is no substitute for a good business plan, especially since operating a WISE involves layering other social outcomes to the normal business bottom line.

The research team observed how one of the project's partners struggled to balance its social mission with the realities of starting a new business in a competitive market. In this situation, the organization recognized in hindsight that it had not conducted sufficient market research and financial forecasting when starting up one of its new social enterprises with the intent of providing a greater diversity of employment opportunities for the job seekers it employed. While the organization worked hard to assess and rectify the situation early on in the life of the enterprise, the management team was unable to overcome key shortcomings in the business design, and ultimately it proved to be financially unsustainable.

These challenges are especially true for WISEs that operate in capital intensive industries, which in the case of this project include enterprises operating recycling or translation services. In the latter case, the WISE partner operating translation services shared how their competitors are threatening to gain competitive advantage through the introduction of new artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to enhance their service offerings in their competitive proposals for large-scale contracts. Several WISE partners shared how they have struggled to secure funding for capital or technological investments to keep up with increasing automation in their sectors due to the small size of their enterprises or limitations imposed on them by their parent organizations. The project team and WISE partners discussed how the soon-to-be-launched Social Finance Fund could provide new opportunities for financing such investments; however, it was not clear to the partners at this time whether they would be in a position to pursue this financing option. However, the WISE partners and their parent organizations are anticipating that they will have to make some difficult decisions in the near future if they want to compete against larger and/or more nimble competitors that have greater access to mainstream financing opportunities.

The WISE partners shared how their organizations bring value to both the individuals they employ and/or train and the broader communities in which they operate. There is a strong commitment among the WISEs not only to be person-centred and ensure that the individuals who work in their social enterprises are supported to obtain meaningful, paid employment, but that they also maintain a strong commitment to community capacity building. Several of the WISE partners shared how their organizations aim to be touchpoints in the community in terms of showcasing inclusive hiring and employment. In some cases, this can also involve supporting grass-roots community movements among the populations that the WISE serves, such as networks of self-advocates with lived experience of disability, or supporting local language and cultural resources within newcomer communities to enhance greater access to services and supports to their members. The partners shared how this capacity building can have a reciprocal effect where employees view their WISE employment as a form of giving back to their communities that gives them value and purpose beyond receiving a pay cheque.

When asked about the value of capturing the long-term outcomes of their WISE training and employment experiences, the WISE partners shared how they saw this research as an opportunity to document and quantify the positive impacts that they had been collecting anecdotally from their current and past participants or employees. The partners shared how the financial and time pressures of operating their WISEs mean that they have limited capacity to measure these impacts formally. They also shared that many aspects of the training and workplace experiences they provide to the populations they serve can be difficult to measure in a systematic way without engaging in professional researchers or evaluators. The partners recognized that these impacts are important for their organizations to capture and share, however, as they can support the business case when engaging both their parent organizations or external stakeholders in discussions about accessing further resources or funding to maintain or expand their operations. Due to their limited capacity, the WISEs often have to resort to

storytelling or other anecdotal approaches that showcase their impact; while these individual stories can represent powerful communication devices, they have limited potential to capture the broader impact that the WISEs are having in terms of the participants and communities they support.

Finally, the WISE partners shared how they appreciated being a part of a project that provided an opportunity to network with other local and provincial WISE practitioners. The partners identified that the structure and resources of the project's Learning Community has been extremely helpful for their organizations to hear about other WISE models and approaches from other practitioners and experts in BC and elsewhere in Canada. The partners appreciated the opportunity to share ideas with other creative leaders as part of the quarterly meetings, as well as having a venue where they could share their struggles and brainstorm opportunities to address the challenges they face. Partners shared that a highlight of their participation in the project was the opportunity to attend the ESDC-hosted national WISE workshops, both in person and more recently through videoconferencing during the pandemic. These workshops offered the WISEs informative presentations on both the models and outcomes of different social enterprises in other regions of Canada, providing inspiration and sparking new ideas to bring back to their own enterprises. Finally, several of the WISE partners shared how the BC Social Enterprise Network that has emerged from the Learning Community will represent an important opportunity to remain connected to a broader network and offer continued opportunities to learn from other WISEs to inform their organization about how they can continue to grow and adapt in response to the emerging realities of their enterprises in the coming years.

Final Conclusions and Lessons for Future Research

This report documents the final outcomes of the BC WISE study since its launch in June 2017. The primary focus of the report is the findings of the final three-year follow-up survey with participants who had participated in a WISE training or work experience intervention at the time they joined the study. It also highlighted the development of the project's Learning Community as it transitioned in 2021 into the BC Social Enterprise Network to serve as a connection point for social enterprise practitioners and sector stakeholders to continue discussing challenges and opportunities to extend the reach and impact of the sector in BC. Finally, the report summarizes the insights and perspectives of project WISE partners on the value to their organizations of being able to participate in research of this nature, as well as their thoughts on the value of the sector and the nature of the challenges their social enterprises are facing to support the populations and communities they have a social mission to serve. These interviews with the partners were focused on providing them with an opportunity to reflect on the unique role that they play in their local economies to hire, train, and foster sustainable livelihoods for community members who face exclusion in the labour market.

The longitudinal study findings highlight some very promising outcomes for participants who engaged in the research study. Given that a large majority of participants could be described as people who face one or more barriers to employment, these findings are notable given the extent to which the key outcomes of participants who completed the final follow-up surveys have continued to improve, despite the additional challenges that vulnerable populations have faced in the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These findings suggest that WISEs represent an effective approach to supporting the labour market and broader social integration of job seekers facing barriers to employment through a combination of formal or informal supports and services — all while providing goods and/or services to the market. As this report has shown, however, developing and operating a WISE is not without its challenges. Over the five-year study period, the project team observed that each WISE partner experienced at least some turnover in leadership and that a number of WISEs were unable to sustain their operations in the face of stiff competition or other market factors. While these events are not uncommon for small businesses, the departure of key leadership or disruption in business operations can negatively impact employees, especially those who require ongoing support in their employment journeys.

The challenges faced by WISEs to maintain their business operations also has implications for conducting longitudinal research with the sector. As this study has shown, it is very challenging to maintain connections with small WISEs — especially those that are not supported by a parent organization — to support follow-up activities with their current or past employees or trainees. Given that they are operating small businesses, WISE leaders also have limited time and capacity to support research of this nature, especially research that involves maintaining connections

with former trainees or employees. Future projects with similar objectives will need to be designed with these considerations in mind to ensure that WISEs have the commitment, time, and financial resources to be able to fully invest in the research. In our final interviews with the project's WISE partners, each partner expressed a strong interest in being part of discussions to design future research approaches to ensure that they align well with both the organizational and operational considerations of the WISE sector.

This report also highlights several considerations for engaging vulnerable populations in longitudinal research studies. The first consideration is to develop a process from the outset where participants feel invested in contributing to the outcomes of the research study. As this study involved engaging participants as they began their WISE training or employment, it is not surprising that participants became increasingly difficult to contact after they left or completed their WISE intervention. A more effective approach may be to engage participants prior to the WISE intervention to ensure that they understand that their participation in the research is independent of their role at the WISE.

The study also highlights the challenges of engaging participants on an annual basis through infrequent communications from the WISE staff or research team. If participants were to be engaged through other support services or networks of people who share a lived experience (such as self-advocate or newcomer networks), they may be more inclined to remain engaged in the study, regardless of whether they remain with the WISE over the duration of the study. To help foster ongoing participant engagement, future research initiatives should also incorporate more frequent touchpoints, possibly involving additional incentives or benefits to motivate participants to want to remain involved in the study.

Finally, this project also provided some lessons for engaging Indigenous-led organizations in research of this nature. While the project team was able to secure a commitment from an Indigenous-led organization at the beginning of the project, the partnership was vulnerable to a change in leadership where new senior team members at the social enterprise did not share the same level of interest or commitment to remaining involved in the study. In hindsight, a more effective approach would have involved engaging several leaders throughout the organization to ensure redundancy and organization-wide commitment. Future research initiatives should also approach potential Indigenous partners in a manner that provides sufficient time and opportunity for consultation and co-creation of the research to ensure that it reflects the culture, values, and needs of all partners.

Appendix A: Year 3 Survey Results Tables

Table 1 – Employment and Income (N=22 responses)

	Total
Pre-COVID-19 Employment	
Employed in the past 12 months (%)	77.27
Categories of employment in the 12 months (%)	
Not employed in the past 12 months	22.73
1-11 months	40.91
Constantly employed over past 12 months	36.36
Employment Impacts since COVID-19	
How COVID-19 affected longer-term employment plans	
No change, career/long-term employment was not affected by the pandemic	59.09
Not able to work, but expect to return when lockdowns removed	9.09
Not able to work, and uncertain of career/longer-term employment plans	18.18
Had to change my career as a result of the pandemic	9.09
Other, neutral or negative change	4.55
COVID-19 employment impact categories (%)	
Lost my job, have since been rehired	18.18
Lost my job, remain unemployed	9.09
Reduced my hours	9.09
No change	54.55
Other (e.g., multiple of the above, changed jobs, delays in hiring/training)	9.09
Current employment since COVID-19	
Currently employed (%)	54.55
Current employment categories (%)	
1: Not working	45.45
2: Working part-time (<30h/wk)	31.82
3: Working full-time (>=30h/wk)	22.73
Current type of employment (%)	
Unemployed	45.45
Permanent, ongoing position	40.91
Other (temporary, fixed term, casual, self-employed, other)	13.64
Current Income categories	
Unemployed	45.45
<= minimum wage (\$15.20)	0.00
> minimum wage (\$15.20)	54.55

Table 1 – Employment and Income (N=22 responses)

Current income since COVID-19	
Currently receiving income (%)	100.00
Number of income sources	1.23
Current income sources (as many as applicable) (%)	
Wages, honorarium, or incentives from WISE or other organization	13.64
Disability Assistance	27.27
Income Assistance (incl. Band Social Assistance)	18.18
EI (Employment Insurance)	9.09
Other paid employment	40.91
Family and friends	13.64
Other	0.00
CRB	0.00

Note: Other income sources were omitted from this table due to low response (CPP had no responses).

Table 2 – Financial stress (N=22 responses)

	Total
Financial stress (scale 1 to 10)	4.73
Ability to pay (%)	
I can't pay my bills	4.55
I find it hard to pay my bills	4.55
I struggle a bit	9.09
I can pay my bills but have nothing left by my next pay cheque	22.73
I'm doing very well and am able to save some money after I pay my bills	27.27
None of these statements apply to me	32.14
Financial Situation	
How would you describe your current financial situation? Select all that apply (%)	
My financial situation is affecting my well-being	18.18
I would like to generate more income but I'm managing	22.73
I'm trying to secure a better job (this could include a more stable job, or getting more hours at work)	4.55
I do not have enough income but I'm not actively trying to generate more	4.55
I'm comfortable or optimistic about my future	31.82
None of these statements apply to me	22.73

Table 3 – Housing (N=22 responses)

	Total
Housing situation (%)	
has not changed in the past 12 months	59.09
has improved in the past 12 months	13.64
has become worse in the past 12 months	4.55
has changed but it is not better or worse than it was 12 months ago	22.73
Worried about housing (%)	45.45
Worried about housing categories (%)	
Always worried about housing	0.00
Sometimes worried about housing	45.45
Never worried about housing	54.55
Housing Worries	
Which of the following statements describe your housing worries? Select all that apply (%)	
Concerns about the cost of housing	27.27
Poor relationship with landlord, management or neighbours	4.55
Fear of eviction	9.09
Safety (of building or neighbourhood)	0.00
Location (unrelated to safety)	0.00
Unit does not meet needs	4.55
Unable to find a better place to live	9.09
Other concerns	0.00

Table 4 – Well-being (N=22)

	Total
Highly Stressed (%)	30.00
Stress categories (%)	
Not at all stressed	10.00
A bit stressed	60.00
Quite stressed	10.00
Extremely stressed	20.00
Health (1= Poor, 10= Excellent)	7.89
Life Satisfaction (1=very dissatisfied, 10= very satisfied)	7.14

Table 5 – Impact of COVID-19 on five key areas (other than employment)

	Total
Experienced impact of COVID-19 (%) (N=15)	68.18
Number of areas impacted by COVID-19 (out of 5)	1.09
Impact of COVID-19 categories (%) (N=15)	
Physical or mental health	22.73
Income	22.73
Housing	18.18
Personal or family circumstances	31.82
Social or community support system	13.64

Table 6 – Social Support (N=22)

	Total
Able to easily get social any support (%)	90.91
Number of social supports easy to get	3.00
Categories of Social Support (Which of the following types of support are you easily able to get?) (%)	
Expert advice (such as financial, medical, mental health, or legal advice)	68.18
Emotional support (or someone to lean on)	81.82
Help with my job or career (such as finding information about, or recommending me to a potential employer)	77.27
Help with household activities (such as childcare, household chores, personal care)	72.73
Network size: How many people can you ask for social support	
None	4.55
1 to 3	31.82
4 to 6	31.82
7 to 10	13.64
More than 10	18.18
Network homogeneity: How many of those people know each other?	
None	9.09
Very few	0.00
Some	31.82
Most	40.91
All	18.18

Appendix B: Profiles of BC WISE Partners

MCC Community Enterprises – Abbotsford, BC

At the time of project launch, MCC Community Enterprises (MCC CE) was operating five social enterprises that employed a total of 100-110 people per year. The enterprises promoted social inclusion, with employees facing a range of barriers. The goal of the MCC CE leadership team was to develop the businesses to the point where they could pay living wages to all employees. The annual revenue from the five businesses described below was approximately \$5 to \$6 million per year:



- 1) Agora Employment Essentials: Established in 1990, this employment services enterprise provides employment opportunities to a spectrum of diverse people in partnership with local agencies and businesses (<http://agoraemployment.ca/>).
- 2) Ecoworks (no longer in operation): Established in 1980s/90s, this landscaping enterprise included an environmental training program for youth. Ecoworks competed for contracts with municipal governments and, at the time of recruitment, employed approximately 35 people/season.
- 3) Common Place Café: Full-service restaurant located in the MCC Centre. Had been operational for about a year at the time of recruitment (<http://mcccentre.ca/common-place-cafe/>).
- 4) Yellow Barn (no longer in operation): A farm market stand with a deli and a coffee shop. Sold produce from the Okanagan and Fraser Valley in the summer and imported fruits and vegetables from the south otherwise.
- 5) Marketplace (no longer in operation): At the time of recruitment, this was the newest MCC social enterprise, located in Abbotsford on Marshall Rd across from Home Depot. Sold furniture, home décor, and other accessories. Products were sourced locally as well as on consignment and by donation.

Communitas – Abbotsford, BC

Offers a range of employment-related services focused on creating employment, facilitating training and assisting with job searching (<https://communitasenterprises.com/>).



Photo credit: Communitas

- 1) Operated two social enterprises at the time of project recruitment: ShredMasters and ValleyRecycle, which provide shredding and recycling services in the Fraser Valley. The shredding and recycling business employed 15-20 people with mental health challenges, intellectual disabilities, and brain injuries.
- 2) As of 2022, Communitas operates Little Sprout Café (a new social enterprise that opened in spring 2020), a janitorial enterprise, CommCrew (a landscaping enterprise) and a vehicle maintenance enterprise.

There is a history of collaboration between MCC and Communitas, as well as between Archway Community Services.

Archway Community Services – Abbotsford, BC

- 1) Interpretation & Translation Services: The interpretation services were originally operated as a start-up initiative with volunteers, but that model led to challenges in the quality of services and securing payment. In 1996, the program transitioned from volunteers to paid employment. Today, 450 freelance interpreters and translators from across the Lower Mainland are affiliated with Archway Community Services and the program is bidding on contracts that are not geographically specific. Encouraging certification and training for the interpreters and translators has been a key part of the enterprise's operations. (<https://www.interpretationandtranslationservices.com>)



2) Delish Catering: This enterprise grew out of group of refugee women who were ACS clients. This program was initiated to provide refugee women who are clients of ACS with FOODSAFE and kitchen training with the ultimate objective of becoming qualified chefs. Funds were donated from ITS to keep Delish active during the pandemic and subsequent challenging financial times. There are plans to restructure the social enterprise and onboard a new coordinator to revitalize its operations and business offerings. (<https://archway.ca/program/delish-fusion-catering>)



Photo credit: Archway Community Services

Upper Skeena Development Centre, Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre – Hazelton, BC

After acquiring the Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre (Senden), Upper Skeena Development Centre established land-based programming for Gitksan youth. This programming offers culturally appropriate life and employment skills, with a focus on the agricultural methods and the Indigenous methods that traditionally provided food sovereignty to peoples of the region. The programming also offers language training (<http://usdc.ca/senden-sustainable-agriculture-resource-centre/photo-gallery/>).



Photo credit: SRDC

At the time of project recruitment, Senden had been engaging 18-30 Gitksan youth three days per week by offering transportation to Senden from across the region, as well as a small honorarium for their participation. In addition to learning how to grow vegetables and navigate the bush to source foods like fish and mushrooms, youth learn food preparation and presentation skills. They also receive training from matriarchs and elders on culturally relevant skills such as weaving.

Prior to the pandemic, Senden was operating as a social program with the objective of becoming a



Photo credits: Senden Agricultural Resource Centre

social enterprise that embeds entrepreneurial skills in its training. It had established a community supported agricultural box program with 10 customers per growing season, which offers youth some exposure to business and market transactions. Senden staff were supporting the youth who completed the programming by serving as a reference for employment and other activities.

Storytellers' Foundation was involved in Upper Skeena Development Centre's acquisition of the Senden Sustainable Agriculture Resource Centre.

Storytellers' Foundation – Hazelton, BC

Youth Works is a youth-led social enterprise with a programming component operated by Storytellers' Foundation (<https://www.storytellersfoundation.org/general-2>). The social enterprise offers catering for events and holds several standing contracts, including one with the Gitanmaax Food and Fuel gas bar and market. The social enterprise employs three youth, who work an average of three four-hour shifts per week preparing catering and seasonal value-added products.

Youth who participate in the social enterprise learn food preparation skills as well as business management skills. The time together at work also provides Storytellers' Foundation staff with an opportunity to build relationships with the youth and use informal and popular education approaches to build work and life skills and goal planning.



Photo credit: SRDC

The notion that Youth Works can serve as a training opportunity for future employment is challenged by the lack of jobs available in the region; for example, there is an abundance of Red Seal chefs in Hazelton and New Hazelton but few opportunities for employment. This situation highlights a tension that Storytellers' Foundation staff struggle with — how much is Youth Works a form of “social programming” and how much is it a “social enterprise” that should be expected to generate enough revenue to be self-sustaining? Relatedly, it is challenging to establish a social enterprise ecosystem in a region where many residents are living on low incomes, facing high rates of unemployment, and managing the impacts of colonization alongside structures of capitalism. Graduated supported employment training in collaboration with other social enterprises in the region could be an idea for supporting the establishment of such a network.

Gitanmaax Development Corporation – Hazelton, BC

The Gitanmaax Development Corporation operates two social enterprises that recruited participants for this study: the Gitanmaax Food and Fuel and the Gitanmaax Market. At the time of project recruitment, the Gitanmaax Food and Fuel was being redeveloped and the employees who had been brought on to construct the new gas station and convenience store were invited to participate in the study, as were the most recently hired employees at the Gitanmaax Market.



Photo credits: SRDC

Appendix C: WISE Partner Focus & Recruitment

WISE NAME	SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FOCUS	# OF RECRUITED PARTICIPANTS	LOCATION	RECRUITMENT
Storytellers' Foundation	Food preparation and catering contracts	3	Hazelton	Rolling (based on turnover)
Gitanmaax Food and Fuel	Construction for the new Gas Bar in 2017-2018 Food market (retail and stocking experience)	8	Hazelton	Project-based and rolling for the Gas Bar, rolling for the Market
Upper Skeena Development Centre – Senden Farm	Food growing and catching, food preparation, food sales	8	Hazelton	Seasonal cohorts (spring to fall)
Mennonite Central Committee Community Enterprises (MCC CE)	Marketplace by MCC CE (retail and café experience)	8	Abbotsford	Seasonal for Ecoworks and Yellow Barn, rolling as needed for Marketplace
	Ecoworks Landscape Services (landscaping experience)			
	Yellow Barn Country Market (retail and café experience)			
Communitas	Work experience programs ("Trainees")	7	Abbotsford	Rolling
	Employment at ShredMasters and Valley Recycling			
Archway Community Services	Interpretation & Translation Services (ITS) (Freelancers)	11	Abbotsford	Rolling
	DELISH Catering (Trainees, and then they are on-call for catering orders)			Rolling

Appendix D: BC Social Enterprise Network Terms of Reference

DATE: March 16, 2021

A. DEFINITION

1. Social enterprises are businesses that sell products or services in the marketplace to achieve social, cultural, or environmental purposes. They reinvest their profits to maximize their social mission and are democratically controlled by their members.
2. They may be operated by non-profit organizations, charitable organizations, co-operatives, or other social-purpose businesses that ascribe to the principles outlined in the first section.

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The purpose of the BC Social Enterprise Network is to provide opportunities for independent organizations operating or supporting social enterprises to work together on mutual interests.

The Network works together to achieve:

1. A more enabling public policy environment for social enterprises to achieve their missions, contribute community benefits, and enhance the well-being of their participants.
2. Mutual learning and development among practitioners and their organizations.
3. Greater public awareness of, and market demand for, social enterprise products and services.
4. Increased corporate, institutional, and government procurement opportunities.
5. Action research and evaluation on outcomes and effective practices of social enterprises.
6. Collaboration in broader socio-economic consultations and dialogues.
7. Facilitating the engagement of social enterprise employees, participants, and other stakeholders, in representing their own views and interests.

The Network meets remotely as and when members agree to the most convenient date and time. Membership is open to all organizations in BC that subscribe to the Network's Definition, Purpose, and Terms of Reference.

The Network is hosted by the BC Centre for Social Enterprise based on operating agreements that may from time to time be mutually agreed upon.

C. BACKGROUND

1. Social enterprises have become a growing sector of the BC, Canadian, and global economy, purposefully integrating social goals with economic activity.
2. In BC, research shows that the sector now earns more than \$500 million annually and provides 13,000 paid jobs (<https://vancouversun.com/business/local-business/b-c-a-mecca-for-social-enterprise-sauder-study-finds>) with a growth rate of 35% over 5 years ending in 2015.
3. Social enterprises play a major role in employment development in BC, creating jobs and training opportunities for those with barriers to employment.
4. They are active in all key sectors of the economy such as: agriculture and food production; fisheries; renewable energy; recycling and waste recovery; information technology; education; health care; financial services; sustainable manufacturing; and retail. (<http://sess.ca/wp-content/uploads/Report-2014-BC.pdf>)
5. Social enterprises play a major role in community economic development in urban and rural communities, Indigenous, and northern settings.
6. The Network has emerged as a means for collaboration in strengthening the social enterprise sector in BC.