

DOCUMENTING THE EVOLUTION OF LEG UP



FURNITURE BANK'S SKILLS BUILDING
AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

JUNE 2014

FURNITURE BANK

FURNISHED HOMES EMPOWERED LIVES

CONTENT

FORWARD	2
CONTEXTUALIZING OUR JOURNEY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
FURNITURE BANK'S STORY	5
GROWTH OF A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE	
SKILLS TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT	
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT	
STAFFING MODEL	7
PROGRAM MANAGER	
WORK AREA SUPERVISORS: WAREHOUSE, CALL CENTRE AND	
CLIENT SERVICES	
FINANCIAL LITERACY FACILITATORS	
OUTREACH, INTAKE AND HIRING	9
JOB POSTING	
HIRING PROCESS	
LESSONS LEARNED	
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	11
ON THE JOB SKILLS TRAINING	
A) Warehouse	
B) Call Centre	
C) Client Services	
LIFE SKILLS TRAINING	13
FINANCIAL LITERACY WORKSHOPS	
JOB SEARCH, RESUME WRITING AND INTERVIEWS	
LESSONS LEARNED	
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING OUR EMPLOYER COUNCIL	15
LESSONS LEARNED	
EMPLOYER COUNCIL FOCUS GROUP	
EVALUATION	16
OUR APPROACH	
EMPLOYABILITY	
Participant Self-Assessment	
Supervisor Assessments	
JOB SKILLS	
FINANCIAL LITERACY	
EMPLOYMENT	
APPENDIX A: THEORY OF CHANGE	19
APPENDIX B: IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR	20
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INTAKE SURVEY	21
APPENDIX D: LEG UP LOGIC MODEL	22
APPENDIX E: EVALUATION MATRIX	23
APPENDIX F: ESAT SAMPLE EVALUATION	24
APPENDIX G: ROBIN'S STORY	25





FORWARD

By Bruce Lawson, Executive Director, The Counselling Foundation of Canada

On behalf of The Counselling Foundation of Canada, I am delighted to provide a foreword for the Documenting the Evolution of Leg Up: Furniture Bank's Skills Building and Employment Program guide. This implementation manual provides valuable insight into how Furniture Bank incorporated a skills training and employment program for at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada who face obstacles to employment into its Furniture Link social enterprise.

The Foundation has a long track record of supporting initiatives that promote the employability and career awareness of Canadians to allow them to improve their lifestyles as well as make a more effective contribution to their communities. We have been especially attracted to those projects that help individuals overcome barriers—financial, academic, language, lack of networks, location, access to services, discrimination, mental health and addictions, disabilities, familial circumstances, socio-cultural expectations—to finding rewarding employment and ultimately a fulfilling career path.

Investing in formalizing the Leg Up program was an easy decision for the Foundation to make given the fact that Furniture Bank has been exceptionally successful at delivering on its core mandate of “collecting gently used furniture and distributing it, free of charge, to newcomers to Canada, women and children coming out of abusive situations and the formerly homeless.” We have witnessed the organization's impressive track record of empowering Canadians and we are pleased to have had an opportunity to invest in growing its influence by enhancing its skills training and job program. The Foundation is confident that Documenting the Evolution of Leg Up: Furniture Bank's Skills Building and Employment Program will provide an invaluable resource for other third-sector agencies interested in enhancing their core operations by offering a labour force readiness and employment program. Congratulations to everyone at Furniture Bank for your leading edge approach to serving the needs of our community and for this comprehensive roadmap to offering a skills training and employment program.



CONTEXTUALIZING OUR JOURNEY

By Susanna Kislenko, Executive Director (Development), Furniture Bank

When we first set out to formalize our skills training and employment program in 2011, we had no idea where we would end up. We went into the process knowing that we had provided some form of training opportunity for years under the umbrella of our social enterprise, Furniture Link. What we did not know enough about was the true value of the opportunities we created and how we could expand our impact even further.

We made a conscious agreement to go into the formalization process with the intention of ‘cracking open’ the very operational models that have propelled our social enterprise to success. We felt that if we were to be a true social purpose enterprise, then we better act like it.

The journey we have been on over the last three years has not always been an easy one, but it has been worthwhile. We deliberately chose to build an evaluation structure while designing the program itself, even though it lengthened the initial development stages by a few months. We view the evaluation process in all its facets as both a way to hold ourselves accountable in ensuring that our program activities are meeting our overarching goals and as a means of sharing our impact with partners and supporters. We are proud of how far we have come. Our journey in program development is an ongoing one and we plan to continue to be reflective and intentional as our organization grows to new regions across Canada.

So much of the credit for Leg Up being what it is goes to Kam Grewal, our hard working and incredibly thoughtful Program Manager, who has kept us on track and never wavered from the goal and from ensuring that Leg Up fit within and wholly supported the work of our operation. Thanks to the foundation that Kam built, we have recently incorporated Leg Up formally into our Theory of Change (**Appendix A**), which is the blueprint for how we move forward and grow as an organization.

A big heap of thanks goes to Noah Kravitz as our constantly curious internal ‘journalist’, who is the author of the document you are about to read.

Ultimately, we could not have had the capacity to evolve our training activities, and formalize them through the birth of Leg Up, without the support of The Counselling Foundation of Canada. Bruce Lawson and Mario Gravelle have been our steadfast companions on this journey and we are very grateful for their unwavering support. We hope we did you proud!

Please enjoy the read – we hope this snapshot in time provides you with some useful insights on your respective journey in this sphere.

INTRODUCTION

The Leg Up skills training and employment program offers an opportunity for at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada facing barriers to employment to gain work experience and skills training on site at Furniture Bank. The program seeks to employ 10-15 participants a year to work in either our Warehouse, Call Centre or Client Services department on a full-time basis for a six months or one year term. While at Furniture Bank, Leg Up participants develop their skills in a team environment through on-the-job learning, mentoring as well as workshops and formal training opportunities.

All of the program participants have experienced some form of barriers in their lives and are often un- or under-employed. Former participants have included refugees to Canada from countries experiencing strife, youth from marginalized neighbourhoods and skilled newcomers to Canada without Canadian work experience. Many of the participants referred to us, and who interview for this program have little to no Canadian work experience or have large employment gaps in their resumes.

A critical element of the Leg Up program is supporting participants to achieve their self-determined personal goals. In this role, the Leg Up staff acts as a support unit for participants to help these participants navigate and connect to community resources to achieve the goals that they set out for themselves at the outset of joining the program.

Furniture Bank has recently begun to establish partnerships with commercial moving companies and corporations who employ warehouse associates as well as driver's helpers and call centre agents. These partnerships allow us to secure interviews for Leg Up participants who are completing their term of employment at Furniture Bank. Through this partnership, companies will guarantee participants a chance to interview for a permanent position in a similar capacity as their training and the work experience they gained at Furniture Bank. At the same time, it has informed us on what employers are looking for in a successful candidate, allowing us to tailor our training program to ensure that participants have the right skills and experience that are valued by businesses in relevant industries.

This manual is designed to share how the Leg Up program works today and capture the development of a skills training and employment program in its early stages. It was written with the intention of providing insights for other organizations looking toward formalizing an employment program within a social enterprise or non-profit setting, as well as for our own internal purposes of understanding ourselves better as we look to grow.



FURNITURE BANK'S STORY

Furniture Bank launched in 1998 with a clear understanding that a sense of pride, self-esteem, comfort and security—in short, a sense of home—are critical ingredients to transition out of lives of passivity and hopelessness into ones of vigour, purpose and direction. Since day one, Furniture Bank's focus has been to empower our clients who are often transitioning out of homelessness, women and children escaping from abusive situations, refugees, and newcomers by providing individuals with the furniture and housewares needed to start their new home and begin the process of rebuilding their lives with dignity.

Over the last 16 years, we have helped more than 60,000 people get settled in and start new chapters in their homes.

GROWTH OF A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Furniture Link, our social enterprise, has had its own growth story. Originally conceived in 2004 as a furniture re-finishing business, the enterprise was already charging for furniture deliveries, but not for pick-ups. In reviewing the business model's effectiveness, the Furniture Bank Board of Directors believed that improvements could be made. This prompted the board to establish a task force in 2006 with the goal of creating a viable business model that would promote the initiative's financial sustainability. After reviewing the model, a decision was made in 2007 to end furniture re-finishing operations and move toward a new business model that charged consistently for pickups and deliveries. In less than a year, Furniture Link was fully structured and operational under this new model.

Adopting this new model proved very successful. By 2012, revenue from Furniture Link made up approximately 70% of Furniture Bank's operating budget, with revenues in the range of \$1 million. This allowed our agency to begin formalizing what we have been doing informally since inception—providing skills based training and work experience for people with barriers to employment.

SKILLS TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Throughout the years, individuals have connected with Furniture Bank for skills training in a variety of ways. Some were former clients who were looking to volunteer and gain work experience while others came directly as volunteers. After gaining training and experience with us, several joined our staff team working in different capacities for various amounts of time. These individuals have gained a variety of skills helping them move on to new and exciting opportunities. In 2011, we decided to formalize our training activities in the development of a formal skills building and employment program.

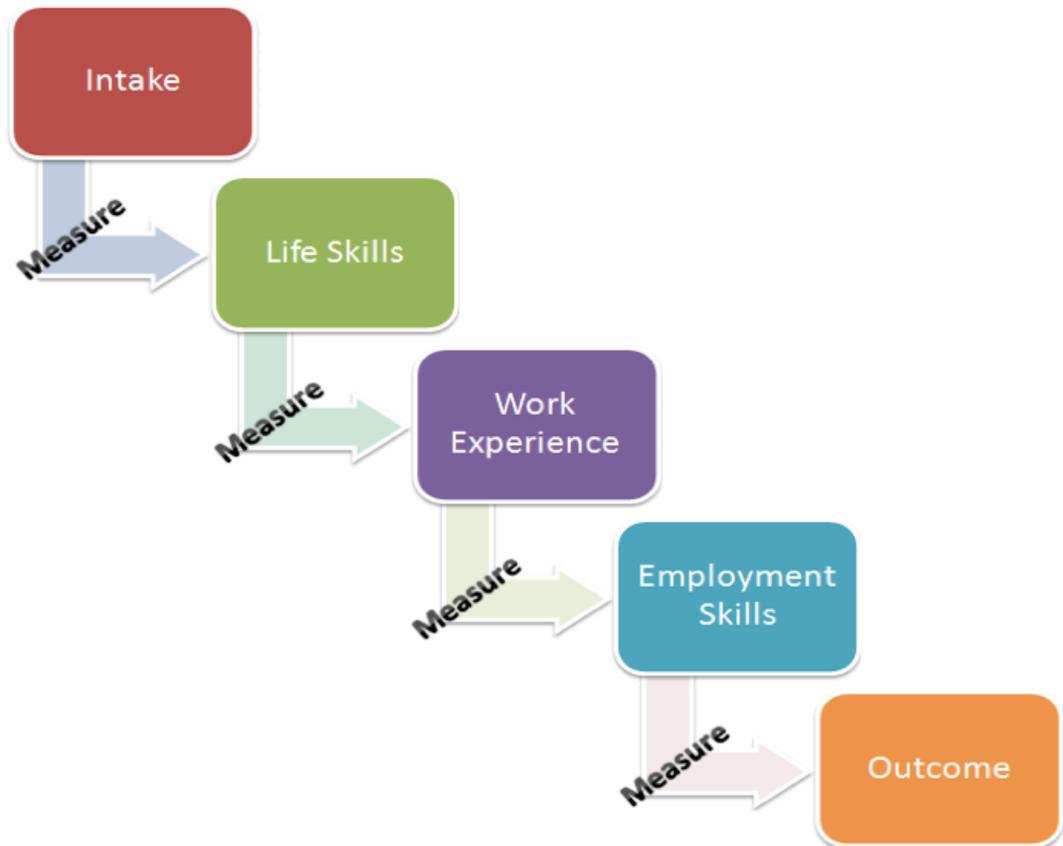
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Formal exploration about the structure of Leg Up started in 2011. This process was supported by generous seed program funding from The Counselling Foundation of Canada allowing Furniture Bank to hire a Program Manager to launch the program. A Program Committee was formed which consisted of the Executive Directors, our Program Manager, and a board member with over thirteen years of program development and evaluation experience

with United Way. The program model which was used to think through Leg Up's framework followed a well-known industry best practice that involves focusing on outcome driven activities. The stages as they appear below are designed as such for three key reasons:

1. The stages act to define the points of contact where inputs, outputs and expected outcomes can be measured.
2. By breaking down the program into discreet activities, it provides a framework for constant improvement and optimization.
3. It provides a unique progression for a participant and can be shared with the individual as a measure of progress itself. By providing this direction, it helps guide participants through the process at every stage.

The following stages were identified and developed in the process of formalization:



The following sections capture our processes and procedures as well as lessons learned throughout the establishment of Leg Up—thinking through program objectives and systemizing our program model.

STAFFING MODEL

The Leg Up program is delivered by a dedicated team from different departments of our social enterprise. Throughout the program, participants receive skills training and employment experience in each department. Members from these departments are involved in different stages of program implementation and evaluation. The team works together to interview prospective candidates, train program participants and evaluate their progress over the course of their stay with us. Below is an overview of the development of our unique staffing model and a description of the tasks that are to be completed by each team member in order to ensure that participants get the most out of their experience in the Leg Up program.

PROGRAM MANAGER'S TRANSITION:

When resources were secured to hire a Program Manager to formalize Furniture Bank's employment program, we chose to promote from within. The candidate that received the position had a depth of knowledge of the organization, our capabilities and our needs, which we knew this evolution would require. It was a unique situation where the timing was just right for this person to evolve in her role and step into this much needed space for Furniture Bank.

PROGRAM MANAGER

The Program Manager oversees the Leg Up program and is responsible for creating and finalizing systems and processes that are related to outreach, participant intake, training and evaluation as well as following up with participants after they have completed their contracts.

The Program Manager's responsibilities include:

• Outreach, Intake and Hiring

The Program Manager is in charge of cultivating relationships with partner agencies and letting them know about job openings when participant positions become available. After an agency connects Furniture Bank with an eligible participant, the Program Manager conducts their first hiring interview and leads an orientation for new participants who have been accepted into the program.

• Participant Support and Evaluation

The Program Manager works with participants to set both personal and professional goals that they want to accomplish during their time at Furniture Bank. Every two months the Program Manager meets with the participant to review progress based on goals they have set and feedback from their supervisor.

- **Resume and Interview Training**

The Program Manager works with participants to help polish their resumes and practice their interview skills for future employment opportunities.

- **Exit Interviews**

The Program Manager holds an exit interview with participants before leaving the program in order to determine what additional support participants may need to acquire and maintain employment following their experience at Furniture Bank.

- **Follow up Interviews**

The Program Manager is currently working on a strategy to follow up with past participants. The goal is to follow up after six months and once again after a year of graduating from the program. This process will allow us to learn about how their experience has been acquiring a job and maintaining employment.

- **Connect to Resources**

The Program Manager connects participants to organizations for additional support and services on a case-by-case basis.

- **Cultivate Relationships with Employer Council Partners**

The Program Manager takes the lead in establishing outtake partners—companies who agree to interview program participants for jobs upon completion of their contract with us.

- **Literature review**

Each year, the Program Manager periodically reviews literature for new findings and approaches related to best practices in training youth and newcomers.

WORK AREA SUPERVISORS: WAREHOUSE, CALL CENTRE AND CLIENT SERVICES

The Supervisors administer specific skills-based training and monitor the day-to-day progress of the participants they supervise. Supervisors are ultimately responsible for providing the necessary training for participants to perform well in their position as well as monitor their progress in order to properly evaluate job performance.

Administrative tasks

The Supervisors are responsible for keeping track of the hours they spend formally training participants, developing training manuals for their department. They also participate in the hiring and evaluation processes.

FINANCIAL LITERACY FACILITATORS

Credit Canada staff facilitate on-site financial literacy workshops (six sessions a year) for participants in a “lunch and learn” format that teaches lessons on topics related to budgeting, banking and credit. Two members from our finance department have also been trained using the Canadian Centre for Financial Literacy’s curriculum in order to provide participants with customized one-on-one consultations for their specific financial literacy needs.



OUTREACH, INTAKE AND HIRING

The Program Manager works with a roster of seven to ten community agencies serving at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada to gather participant referrals for Leg Up. It made sense to utilize this pool of contacts for participant intake as well as we have been working with many of these social service agencies for a number of years on the client service (furniture donation) side and already had established relationships. Many of the agencies we work with provide job skills training courses and programs for at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada, making it a natural fit for us to partner with them for Leg Up. That was our starting point and over the next two years, we cultivated new relationships with other youth-focused agencies¹ that were a good match for our agency's main criteria.

At times, partner agencies reach out to us to see if employment opportunities are available within the Leg Up program, and when a position opens up, the Program Manager will call or email the employment worker at one of our partner agency to advertise the job posting. Based on these discussions, the Program Manager determines whether the agency has a suitable candidate for employment. If they do, we will extend an invitation for them to accompany their employment candidate for an orientation to learn more about the position and Furniture Bank as an organization. This allows both parties to determine whether this will be a good fit moving forward before the applicant formally interviews for the position.

Over the past year, we have learned a great deal about what kind of participants we are best equipped to train and support. When we began to formally hire participants in 2013, we welcomed anyone who fit the marginalized youth or newcomer categories. Through our experience, we learned that it was important to refine that criteria further to set participants up for success. We have learned that individuals that gain the most from the Leg Up program include youth that have employment gaps in their resume who want to get back into the workforce and newcomers with little to no Canadian work experience looking to establish themselves in Canada. We seek participants who have some form of existing support network around them before their time at Furniture Bank. We learned that unless the participant already has stable housing and social networks, it was difficult for us to provide meaningful training opportunities that are truly sustainable and will lead to long-term financial and contribute to their mental health. These were important lessons for us to learn and we are now able to communicate this information to our intake partners when seeking participant positions.

"My experience with Furniture Bank has been one of positive reinforcement. After numerous intermittent periods of layoff and ontario works support, it was a relief to finally be able to settle down again at a job that was both functional and gratifying."

-Sylvestor, Former Leg Up Participant.

¹ Our current list of intake partners includes: St. Christopher House, Employment Ontario, Skills for Change, ACCESS Employment, Investing in Neighbourhoods and Microskills.

JOB POSTING

We create a job posting that circulates to our agency partners by email when a position becomes available two weeks prior to beginning the hiring process. Job postings exist for each participant position that we hire for – warehouse, call centre and client services. We revisit these job postings periodically to update for any new training requirements that are needed positions we hire for. This ensures that they remain current.

HIRING PROCESS

The hiring process happens in three separate stages consisting of an orientation, interview and hiring meeting.

1. Orientation

After a partner agency provides us a referral, we invite the potential applicant and their employment worker for an orientation session. The purpose of the orientation is for the Program Manager and Department Supervisor to get to know the prospective applicant and vice versa in a casual setting. During the orientation, potential participants receive a site tour, an introduction to Furniture Bank and the Leg Up program, as well as learn about the hiring process. At the end of the session, if the person is still interested in the position and the Program Manager and Supervisor feel that they will be a good fit, the candidate is invited in for a formal interview.

Hosting an orientation before conducting an interview has many great advantages:

- Potential participants are able to get a sense of what their day-to-day job will be like and decide whether it is a good fit for him/her or not.
- For many of the candidates it has been a long time since they have last interviewed for a job, so being able to come in and showcase their work ethic and personality in a more informal setting gives them a chance to communicate and open up without the pressure of a sit-down interview.

- Department Supervisors are able to spend some time getting to know potential applicants and get some insight into how they might work in a team environment.

- Applicants are more comfortable during their formal interview because they are familiar with the building, know a bit about the organization and see familiar faces when sitting down for their interview.

2. Interview

Each interview team is made up of two staff--the Program Manager and the Department Supervisor. The main purpose of the interview is for the Supervisor to get to know the applicant and ask important questions to learn if they will be a good fit for the position. For many of the applicants, this may be their first formal job interview they have had in a while, so we recommend taking the time to welcome them and let them know what to expect during the interview process. We are currently working on developing an interview script that will include standardized questions for the Program Manager and Supervisors to ask program candidates during interviews.²

3. Hiring Meeting

Once the applicant accepts a position and paperwork is confirmed, they are invited to a hiring meeting. During this meeting the Program Manager and Department Supervisor sit down with participants to go over their contract and sign appropriate documents.

LESSONS LEARNED

- When determining the different kinds of support that your employment program will include, it is important to properly evaluate your staff team to ensure you have the internal capacity to deliver on each and sustain the process over time.
- Tightening your intake screening process will make sure your community partners understand what type of participant will gain the most from your program. We suggest developing an intake form to distribute to your partners.

² For more information, please see the Implementation Calendar in Appendix B.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The goal of the Leg Up program is to provide youth and newcomers who have been disconnected from the labour market or who have limited Canadian work experience, the skills and experience to empower them to positively change their lives. This philosophy has guided all decisions made by the committee in developing the program's cornerstones. The following section describes both the on-the-job skills and training participants gain from the program, and the life skills support participants receive from Leg Up.

ON THE JOB SKILLS TRAINING

Leg Up participants work in either our warehouse, in the call centre or client service reception. Below is a list of specific skills participants gain from working in the respective departments. This should give you a sense of the transferable skills participants gain from their experience in the Leg Up program.

A) Warehouse

Health and Safety

- Safe lifting techniques
- Safe use of loading device equipment

Shipping and Receiving

- Properly loading and unloading delivery trucks

Waste Management

- Proper waste management procedures
- Proper up-to-date recycling practices

Inventory Control

- Keeping inventory of furniture
- Effectively organizing the warehouse and showroom

- Prioritizing furniture items based on client needs
- Basic furniture cleaning and maintenance procedures

Computer Skills

- Data entry to record furniture donation intake

Order Picking

- Safely packing, labeling and preparing equipment for transportation

Assisting with Orders, Pickups and Deliveries

- Providing customer service when assisting with furniture pickup and delivery to donors and clients

Furniture Repair

- General repair and assembly skills of household items

B) Call Centre

Data Entry

- Training in and use of Salesforce database software

Communication skills

- Communicating charitable mission of Furniture Bank over the phone, clearly describing the donation process to prospective supporters
- Writing personalized thank you letters to furniture donors

Customer Service

- Friendly customer service when answering phones and processing donations
- Professionalism when answering donor inquiries and accepting payment over the phone
- Informing donors of household items that we accept and do not accept

Math and Literacy

- Calculating cost for pickup service and tax receipting based on items donated
- Using phone scripts and following call centre procedures and guidelines

Time Management

- Experience working with competing deadlines

Client Services

Communication Skills

- Interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds (clients, staff and volunteer support workers)
- Work within an anti-oppressive framework
- Clearly communicate when working with clients who are new to Canada
- Help clients with life management skills

Customer Service

- Problem solve on a case-by-case basis
- Friendly customer service when answering phones and processing deliveries
- Filling out and recording client forms
- Assist clients to prioritize furniture needs

Data Entry and Math Skills

- Training in and use of client database computer program (Salesforce)
- Keeping inventory of furniture clients receive
- Adding delivery fees and operating debit terminal
- Taking measurements of furniture items for clients



One of our call centre participants hard at work.



LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

The Program Committee put a great deal of thought into determining the kinds of life skills training the Leg Up program should provide. The committee took two items into consideration: (a) the greatest needs of the youth and newcomer participants and (b) ensuring that there is a balance between internal capacity and external support to effectively deliver on identified training opportunities.

We recognised we were not the experts in every area and that our expertise lies in the training of hard skills and providing an overall office environment and experience. Once we identified those key life skills areas we were interested in integrating into the first stage of program development, we began to seek external partners that were a good match to help us provide this training.

FINANCIAL LITERACY WORKSHOPS

Our environmental scan of similar employment programs operated by non-profit organizations showed that financial literacy training was a common support program. After conducting an internal survey of all participants in 2012, we found that financial stress was often a leading barrier to sustainable livelihood. This survey revealed key information that indicated a need for more in depth financial literacy.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Over half of our participants were dedicating more than 50% of their income to rent at some point in time;
- Several of our participants were either “always worried” or “sometimes worried” about their housing situation and said that if they lost their job, it would be increasingly difficult to pay rent;
- None of our participants summarized their financial situation as “excellent” or “good”, in fact, most said it was “extremely poor” or “poor”.

As a result of these findings, the Program Committee made it a strategic priority to leverage resources to include financial literacy training as part of our employment program. We partnered with Credit Canada in 2013 to deliver in-house financial literacy workshops facilitated by certified debt counsellors.

“I thought the Financial Literacy Workshop was very informative. The information was laid down in a way that I feel most people can understand. I believe that once people take the workshop it forces them to deal with the problem if they have one. But even more than that it helps people see that there is a solution to these problems and ignoring them isn't the best solution.”

-Matthew, Former Leg Up Participant

Workshop topics include: budgeting strategies, understanding bank accounts and common bank services, using loans and credit cards, managing and paying down debt, as well as how to effectively save for important purchases. Although the participants found the workshops to be useful, we identified a need for individualized coaching and support in addition to the group workshops. To support this, we trained two members of our finance team through the Canadian Centre for Financial Literacy to have them certified to deliver one on one workshops customized for a participant's current situation.

JOB SEARCH, RESUME WRITING AND INTERVIEWS

We are currently in discussions with Toronto Employment Social Services (TESS) to have them lead and facilitate a series of life skills workshops including mock interviews and resume writing for participants of Leg Up. Furniture Bank plans to hold this eight week life skills workshop on site in the Fall of 2014.

LESSONS LEARNED

- As financial literacy understanding is key to long term success and sustainability, it is advisable to consider implementing a financial literacy training component into your employment program. You may want to survey your potential or current participants to be sure this is appropriate.
- When developing a skills training and employment program it is important to consider the benefits of both partnerships and having your own internal resources for providing support and to think about what the balance will be. Your organization does not need to be the expert at everything!



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING OUR EMPLOYER COUNCIL

Over the past two years we have instituted an Employer Council for the Leg Up program. In short, an Employer Council is an outplacement model used by youth skills training and employment programs in the United States. Companies are recruited and make a commitment to the organization to interview program participants after they complete their term of employment.

The Program Committee chose this model because if a participant can earn a job by going through the interview process, it will be a true testament that they were able to build their skills and confidence to secure gainful employment and became more employable as a whole. The Employer Council will also provide valuable knowledge about what companies in relevant industries are looking for to fill their labour force needs and allow us to feed this information back into the program and modify our approach accordingly. Companies that we have recruited have a high demand for warehouse associates, driver's helpers and call centre clerks—positions that our participants receive on-the-job skills training in. We are always actively seeking to grow our roster of Employment Council³ partners by networking with companies that have potential employment opportunities for Leg Up participants.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through our work with employers and Employer Council partners, we learned that companies put a higher value on such characteristics as adaptability, positive attitude and motivation and such soft skills as an ability to work in teams, communication and openness to learn in comparison to job specific training which can be taught over time. If a participant has these skills and characteristics, companies are confident they can teach them the technical skills to succeed in the job. We were initially surprised by this as our assumption was that hard skills were the most important factor for employers. This finding drove home the point that it is critical to have employers involved at the early stages of the intake and training development process. As we recently learned from another sector-focused organization, "if what is being learned by participants is not valuable to the employer, then it is not valuable to the participant either!"

EMPLOYER COUNCIL FOCUS GROUP

The focus group is currently working with our Employer Council members to explore the job-specific and employability skills that employers are looking for. The goal of the focus group is to keep up to date on the skills that our members are looking for and anticipate needing as well as track changes over time to ensure that participants are in the best possible position to succeed in the workforce.

³ Current Employer Council Partners include: AMJ Campbell, Tippet Richardson, Atlas Van Lines and Design Republic.



EVALUATION

We continue to learn and expand our knowledge of other successful employer and sector engagement training models. In 2013, our Program Manager gained evaluation certification and training via the Canadian Evaluation Society as a base of knowledge of evaluation principles. In addition, our Program Manager worked with an evaluation consultant⁴ throughout much of the year, who provided coaching and support to our Program Manager in develop a sustainable evaluation plan for Leg Up. As one of our greatest challenges was the evolution of internal culture to accept evaluation as part of day to day activities, this was one of the most critical types of support that the consultant provided. In addition, the collaboration helped the team think critically through the different elements of the program and understand the kinds of support that we are equipped to provide participants with. This work has provided us with valuable insight into how we should proceed with our evaluation efforts and how to collect relevant data.

A concrete evaluation plan with an evaluation matrix, methods for data collection and a draft logic model that covered Leg Up's goals, activities and participant outcomes (short and long-term) was developed over a six month period. This process also resulted in the development of a program logic model (**Appendix D**).

OUR APPROACH

We have developed an Evaluation Matrix that identifies both the social outcomes that the program has on participants and the quality and effectiveness of the program. This Matrix identifies four priorities for evaluating participant progress. The four areas of focus include:

- **Employability**
- **Job Skills**
- **Financial Literacy**
- **Employment**

For each area of focus, the evaluation matrix identifies pertinent evaluation questions, indicators, data collection tools, data sources and identifies who is responsible for data collection and a corresponding time line. The Leg Up program uses a number of data collection methods. Some methods are used for more than one area of focus while some are specific to individual focus areas.⁵

EMPLOYABILITY

Participant Self-Assessment

After three weeks on the job, participants complete a self-assessment survey. This survey provides Leg Up's Program Manager with baseline data to track how participants are gaining employability skills over the course of their contract. These survey questions are based on nine key variables that the Employment Skills Assessment and Measurement Tool

⁴ Paul Bakker of Social Impact Squared.

⁵ To see Leg Up's Evaluation Matrix, please refer to **Appendix E**.

(ESAT) identifies as critical indicators to assess an individual's growth in employability.

ESAT's employability indicators:

- **Motivation**
- **Attitude**
- **Time Management**
- **Stress Management**
- **Presentation**
- **Team Work**
- **Adaptability**
- **Confidence**

Program participants complete these surveys every three months. This allows the Program Manager to measure participant growth and report on outcomes that are a direct result of their experience in the Leg Up program. This process has two benefits: (1) it provides the participant a space to self-reflect on their personal growth/progress and (2) It gives the Program Manager an opportunity to identify where additional support may be needed and to debrief with participants about their progress and challenges. Information gained through this process allows us to modify our program as needed. For example, if a participant working in the Call Centre continues to lack confidence in their computer skills even after receiving appropriate training, we can look at ways to improve the program's training components and provide additional on-site support.

In 2013 we piloted ESAT, an employability measurement tool, provided by Futureworx Society. ESAT provides a process to track and measure an individual's improvements in employability over a period of time. For more information, please see **Appendix F** for a sample ESAT Evaluation.

Supervisor Assessments

In addition to participant self-assessments, Department Supervisors also observe participants' employability skills. After a participant's first month at Furniture Bank, their Supervisor completes an assessment of his/her employability skills using ESAT. This is then conducted every 2-3 months, depending on the length of the participant's contract. The next step to assist the Supervisors and provide consistency will be the creation of a rubric that defines different job performance levels. Comparing the Supervisors and participants self-assessments allows for the Program Manager to identify areas where reflections are consistent and where they differ and to follow up accordingly with either.

In order to assess which aspects of the employability skills development approach is working and what can be improved, performance interviews with participants, focus groups with supervisors and management and interviews with past program participants are held every 2-3 months.

Job Skills

The evaluation of job skills identifies the job training participants receive in the program and how much they improve their skills. Data collection methods include time tracking, performance interviews with current and past participants, written tests and Supervisor observation. Evaluation questions are also used to identify additional training and structure to improve Leg Up's training components and to assess the skills Trainers currently have and need to develop.

Financial Literacy

The evaluation of the financial literacy component identifies how much participant financial literacy has improved as a result of the workshops and how it helped to improve their lives and the lives of their family members. Data collection tools include intake surveys, exit interviews using survey questions from the Canadian Centre for Financial Literacy and follow-up interviews. Another evaluation serves to identify the aspects of the financial literacy approach that are working well and those that could be improved. This is done by using workshop evaluation forms and conducting focus groups with facilitators.

Employment

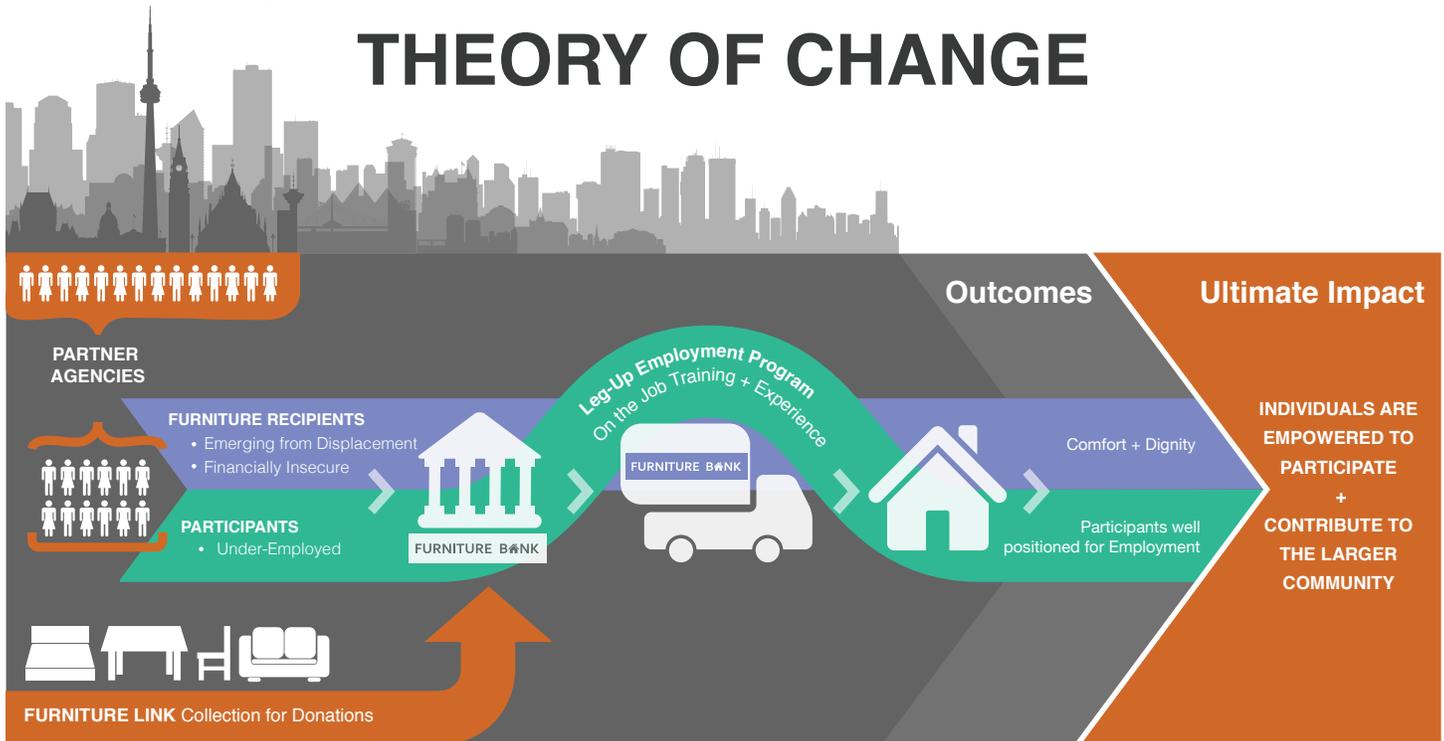
The last area of focus evaluates whether participants obtained employment after completing the Leg Up program and their assessment of the support they received in the program. The Program Manager seeks to learn from participants about any type of additional support they feel would help them program participants gain employment. The Program Manager asks participants a set of closed-ended questions at the end of the program during their exit interview to collect this data. The Program Manager also follows-up with former participants either in-person or by phone to find out how many participants secured employment within or outside Furniture Bank after six months of completing the program.

APPENDIX A: THEORY OF CHANGE

FURNITURE BANK

FURNISHED HOMES EMPOWERED LIVES

THEORY OF CHANGE



APPENDIX B: IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR

The following table maps the work that is still in progress for Leg Up.

STAGE	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE
Intake	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Participant intake forms2. Standardized Interview Questions	To ensure that we hire the most appropriate candidates who will gain the most from the program.
Skills Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Departmental training manuals2. Customized financial literacy training3. Job search, resume writing, mock interview	To ensure that we provide effective skills based training and offer support that will help participants become more employable.
Participant Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Supervisor Rubrics2. Job Skills Test	Fairly evaluate and report on participant progress throughout their time in the Leg Up Program.
Program Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Former participant follow up2. Focus Group: Employer Council, Financial Literacy, Facilitators, Former Participants	To ensure program elements are up to date and improve program elements.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INTAKE SURVEY

Program Participants 2013

1. Participant Name:

Participant Name:

2. Gender:

Male

Female

Other

3. Age Group

Under 25

25-29

30-39

40 or more

4. Participant history

Youth

Immigrant/newcomer

Formerly homeless

Formerly in the criminal justice system

ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) recipient

OW (Ontario Works) recipient

Other (please specify)

5. How did you join the Furniture Bank employment program?

Transitioned from client

Transitioned from volunteer

Transitioned from co-op placement/internship

Referred by agency

Other (please specify)

6. When did you join the Furniture Bank employment program?

MONTH **YEAR**

Please choose Month Year

7. What hands-on training does your work at Furniture Bank focus on?

Warehousing

Call centre

Client services

Office/administration

Other (please specify)

8. Please select the following training sessions that you have completed at Furniture Bank (select all that apply).

Furniture Bank orientation session

Financial literacy training

Computer literacy training

Workplace culture training

Job search/resume skills workshop

Other (please specify)

9. What would you like to gain from your time at Furniture Bank? Please check all that apply.

Work experience

Permanent employment within Furniture Bank

Permanent employment outside of Furniture Bank

Help with the skills needed to keep a job

Help solve my barriers to getting and keeping a job

Job skills building

Networking opportunities

Other (please specify)

10. Six months prior to joining Furniture Bank, what was your housing status? Please check all that apply.

Permanent non-subsidized housing

Subsidized housing

Transitional housing

Homeless or living in a shelter

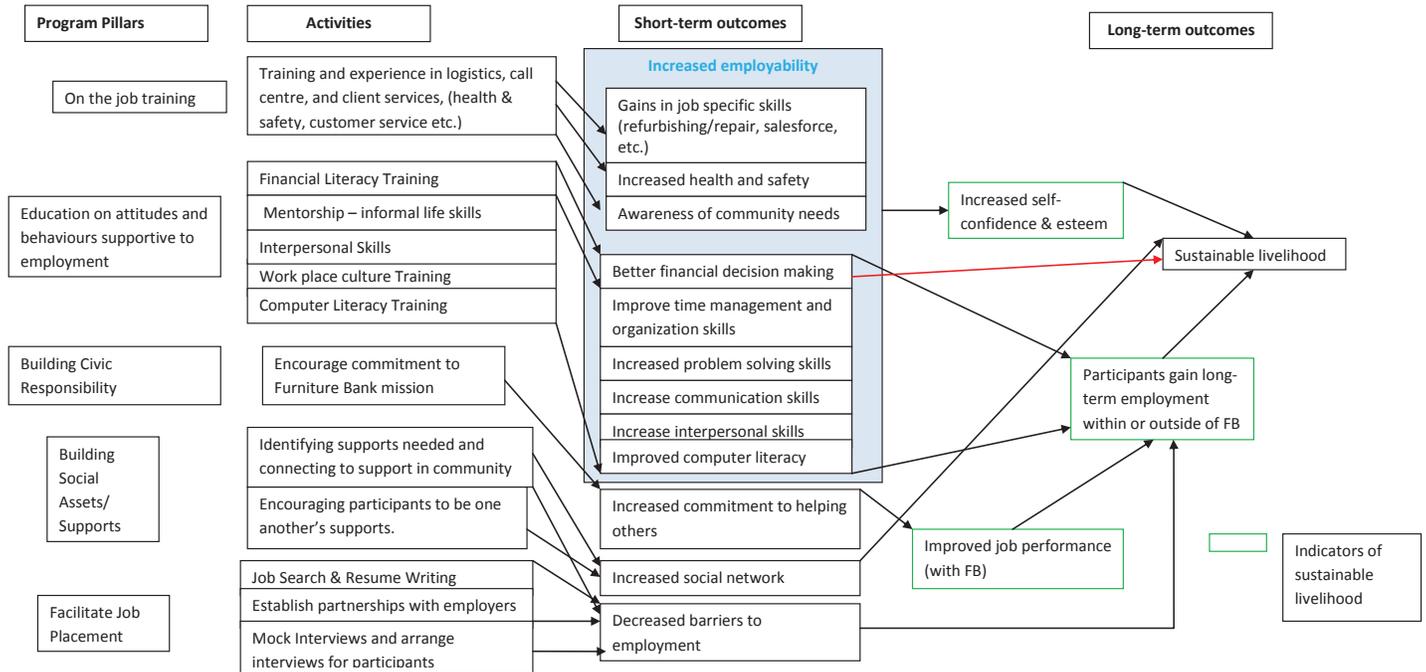
Staying with friends or family

Paid more than 30% of total income on rent

Other (please specify)

APPENDIX D: LEG UP LOGIC MODEL

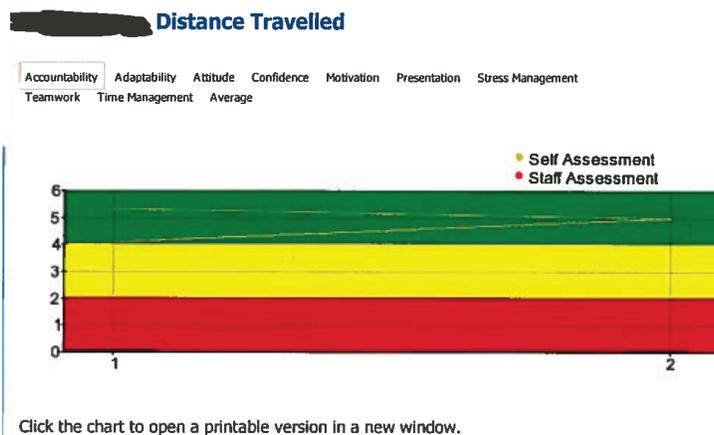
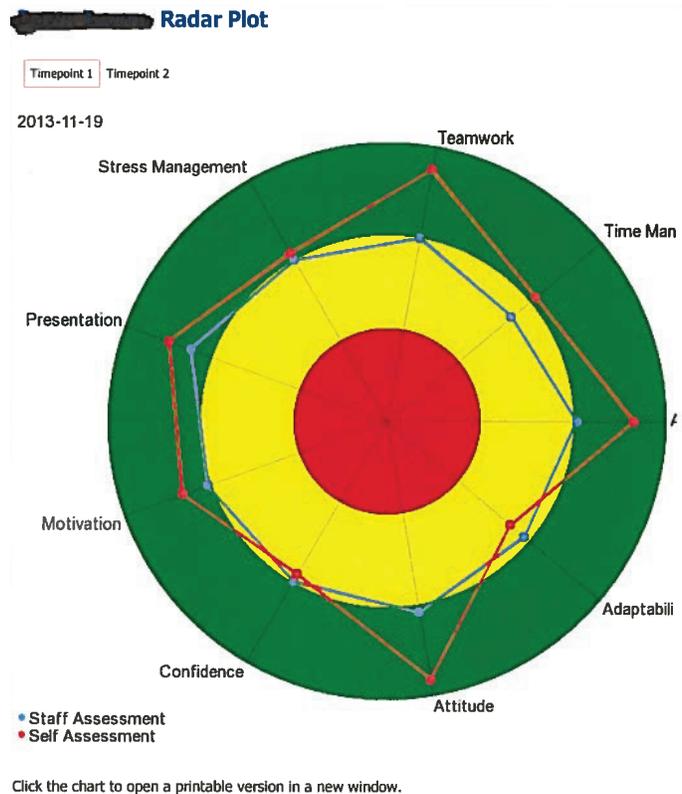
FURNITURE BANK – LEG UP LOGIC MODEL DRAFT



APPENDIX E: EVALUATION MATRIX (SNAPSHOT)

Evaluation Question	Indicators	Data collection Tools	Data Source(s)	Who collects	When
Job Skills					
What job training do participants get as part of Leg-up?	Amounts of different types of skills training received by participants	1. Time tracking on formal training 2. Document review 3. Performance interviews with participants 4. Interviews with past participants	1. Supervisors 2. Training documents 3. Participants 4. Past participants	1. Supervisors 2. Program Manager 3. Program Manager 4. Program Manager	1. Time tracking daily 2. Annually 3. Every 2 months. 4. One time
What skills do trainers currently have and need to develop?	Needed skills identified by accreditation/training programs Lists of skills on staff's resumes/profiles Strengths & weakness identified in performance review	Review of best practices Document Review Performance feedback forms	Training/ accreditation organizations Trainer's resumes & staff profiles Participants, other staff, and hiring manager	Program Manager Hiring manager Hiring manager	Once every few years As staff are hired Annually
How can the job-skills training be improved in terms of additional training and structure	Opinions on how the training can be improved	1. Interviews with past participants 2. Performance interviews with participants 3. Focus group with supervisors and management	1. Past participants 2. Participants 3. Trainers	Program Manager	1. One time 2. Every 2 months 3. Once every 6 months
Financial Literacy					
Best practices in youth and newcomer job-skills training as outlined in literature		Literature Review	Literature	Program Manager	Once every few years
Types and methods of job-skills used by similar employment programs		Environmental Scan (document reviews, interviews, and/or survey)	Similar Employment Programs	Program Manager	Once every few years
Job-skills desired by employers		Employer Council focus group	Employer Council	Program Manager	Once every few years
Knowledge test scores (list of skills areas to be developed)		Written tests	Participants	Supervisors	During orientation and when supervisors believe participants are ready for tests
What types of skills do they develop as part of Leg-up? How much do those skills improve?	Demonstrations of proficiency to complete certain tasks (list of skills areas to be developed) Participants' self-reported proficiency at intake	1. Supervisor observation 2. Performance metrics Intake survey	1. Supervisors 2. Performance Tracking Systems Participants	1. Supervisors 2. Administrative systems & different staff Program Manager	1. During orientation and when supervisors believe participants are ready for tests 2. Ongoing At intake
Financial Literacy					
How great is the need for financial literacy among Leg-up participants? How much did their financial literacy improve through the training?	Financial Literacy scores at pre and post	Intake survey & Exit interviews (Survey questions from Canadian Centre for Financial Literacy)	Participants	Workshop Facilitators	Intake & every 6 months
What aspects of the financial literacy training approach are working well?	Opinions of participants & Facilitators	1. Workshop evaluation forms 3. Facilitator focus group	1. Participants 2. Participants 3. Facilitators	1. Facilitators 2. Program Manager	TBD
What aspects of the financial literacy training approach could be improved?	Opinions of participants & Facilitators	1. Workshop evaluation forms 3. Facilitator focus group	1. Participants 2. Participants 3. Facilitators	1. Facilitators 2. Program Manager	TBD
How does participants' improved financial literacy improve their lives and the lives of their immediate families?	Reported benefits by participants	1. Exit interviews (with some closed-ended Q's) 2. Follow-up interviews (with some closed-ended Q's)	1. Participants 2. Participants	Program Manager	1. At program exit 2. 6 months post program
Employability					
What kinds of employability skills supports do Leg-up participants get?	% of participants that receive different types of employability skills support	1. Performance interviews with participants 2. Supervisor and Program Manager observations as part of performance interviews 3. Interviews with past participants	1. Participants 2. Supervisors & Program Manager 3. Past Participants	1. Program Manager 2. Supervisors & Program Manager 3. Program Manager	1. Every 2 months 2. Every 2 months 3. One time
How much do Leg-up participants' employability skills	Changes in participants' overall ESAT score and subscores.	ESAT Measurement Tool (surveys and observations)	Participants, Supervisors, Other staff working with	Program Manager	Intake & every 2 months
Employment					
How many participants get employment either within or outside of Furniture Bank after their 6 month - 1 year term with Leg-up?	% of participants that are employed within or outside of Furniture Bank 6 months after contract completion	1. Follow-up interviews (with some closed-ended Q's). To be completed by phone, in person, or by mail, if needed.	Participants	Program Manager	6 months post program
Participant Characteristics					
What are the characteristics of participants that achieve the best outcomes from Leg-up?	Participants with certain characteristics demonstrate better outcomes than other participants	In-take forms, plus outcome measurement tools from above.	As identified above	As identified above	As identified above
What are the characteristics of participants with barriers to achieving outcomes from Leg-up?	Participants with certain characteristics demonstrate worse outcomes than other participants	In-take forms, plus outcome measurement tools from above.	As identified above	As identified above	As identified above

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE OF AN ESAT EVALUATION FOR A LEG UP PARTICIPANT



APPENDIX G: ROBIN'S STORY

"I am 22 years old and a mother of 2 boys. I've been taking care of my children as a stay at home mom for roughly 4 years. In that time frame, I hadn't worked at all. I had even forgotten what it was like to work.

By the time my youngest turned a year old, I felt like I was ready to start getting into the workforce again. Having been out of work for the past couple of years, my resume looked terrible. I felt if employers were to look at my resume it'd immediately go into the recycling as soon as they saw it, because, well, there's a big gap in my employment history.

I was very grateful to get a placement at Furniture Bank. It has been very educating. I've learned a lot of new skills, many that can be used for future endeavors, and have met a lot of kind-hearted people from all sorts of backgrounds, co-workers and clients alike. It's very rewarding on a daily basis as there are clients who give us hugs or shed a few tears because they are so full of joy that they are able to provide a proper home for their family. I felt a great sense of purpose working at Furniture Bank.

As someone who lost all hope of ever finding a job again and had to start over from square one, I really am thankful for the opportunity to learn and grow at Furniture Bank."

-Robin, *Former Leg Up Participant*



WRITTEN BY: NOAH KRAVITZ
LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY: MICHELLE ZHENG