

Homeward Bound

Children Project



***An in-depth exploration into the impact of
WoodGreen's Homeward Bound program on participants' children***

DECEMBER 2021

WoodGreen Community Services

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Executive Summary – Study Details

METHODS

			
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS	BACKGROUND RESEARCH	QUANTITATIVE TUTORING DATA	INSIGHTS FROM SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS





DATA SOURCES

			
17 + 1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS + WRITTEN RESPONSES	10 + RESEARCH SOURCES	2 YEARS OF TUTORING PROGRAM DATA	7 STAFF CONSULTED/ CONTRIBUTED

18 MOTHERS INTERVIEWED

			
11 PAST PARTICIPANTS	7 ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS	2 WITHDRAWN PARTICIPANTS	4 NEWCOMER PARTICIPANTS
← GRADUATED → 4 MONTHS 7 YEARS	← PHASE → PHASE 1 PHASE 2	← LEFT AFTER → PHASE 1 PHASE 2	← ARRIVED → < 1 YEAR 3 YEARS

8 CHILDREN INTERVIEWED

			
24 TOTAL CHILDREN	8 INTERVIEWED CHILDREN	AT TIME OF INTERVIEW	DURING THEIR TIME IN HB
← AGE → 1.5 YEARS 21 YEARS	← AVG AGE: 12 → 5 YEARS 21 YEARS	← AVG AGE: 9.5 → 1.5 YEARS 21 YEARS	← AVG AGE: 6.7 → 0.5 YEARS 16 YEARS

The Homeward Bound program, run by WoodGreen Community Services, is a four-year program designed to help inadequately housed or homeless mother-led families earn college diplomas and achieve economic and personal self-sufficiency.

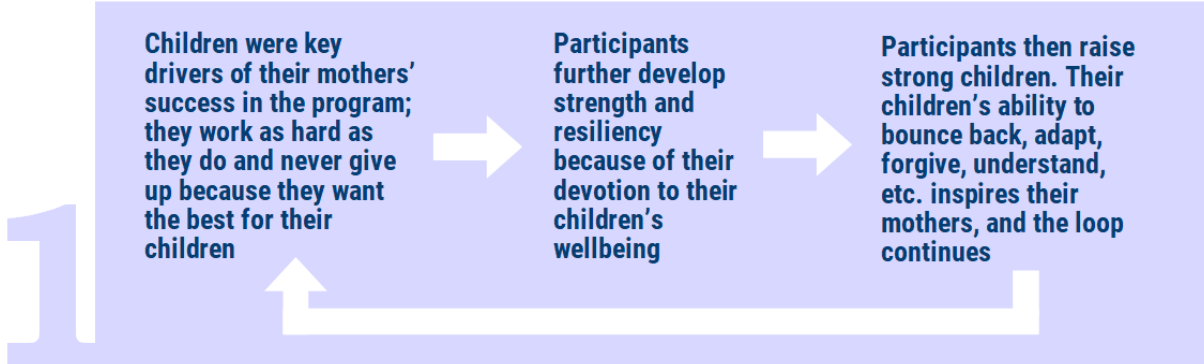
400 THE APPROX. NUMBER OF MOMS IMPACTED BY THE PROGRAM

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE HOMEWARD BOUND PROGRAM **2004**

1.5 THE APPROX. NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER PARTICIPANT

Our understanding of the impact on the children in the program is limited. Therefore, this study aimed to better understand this impact and incorporate new children-centred monitoring and evaluation processes into Homeward Bound’s impact measurement activities .

Executive Summary - Results



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TOP THEMES IN THE FIVE DOMAINS

<p>SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING</p> <p>1) Children's Wellbeing 4 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Children being able to have their own room and therefore more independence</p> <p>2) Mother's Wellbeing 6 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Mothers being able to parent on their own terms and overall be more independent</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>1) Children's Relationships 6 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Children spoke of great relationships with their moms</p> <p>2) Mother's Relationships 5 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Relations with other participants were impactful on the wellbeing of the family</p>	
<p>EDUCATION</p> <p>1) Switching Schools/Daycares 7 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Separation anxiety was often present, but temporary</p> <p>2) Improved Skills in Daycare 4 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Improved behavioural issues</p> <p>3) Feedback on Debbie Yeung Childcare Centre 3 THEMES</p> <p>4) Schooling from Home During COVID-19 3 THEMES</p> <p>5) Improved School Performance and Attendance</p> <p>Top theme: The tutoring program was very impactful on the kids' educational wellbeing</p>	<p>HEALTH</p> <p>1) Healthy Eating 6 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Not an issue of access, but an issue of time</p> <p>2) Physical Health 3 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: Sleep/sleep training improved</p> <p>3) Mental Health 6 THEMES</p> <p>Top themes: Both moms and kids faced mental health challenges; many saw improvements during the program. Gaining distance from critical relatives and focusing on spirituality helped families' overall mental health</p>	<p>STABILITY</p> <p>1) Financial Stability 6 THEMES</p> <p>Top themes: Generally, moms felt they were the same or more financially stable during their time in the program. And the financial education they received (especially budgeting and saving) was invaluable</p> <p>2) Stability in General 2 THEMES</p> <p>Top theme: The program provided a bit of a break from the real world so they could "feel sane" again</p>

3

<p>DEVELOP</p> <p>Indoctrinated Pre and Post Program Survey on Child Wellbeing</p>	<p>ORGANIZE</p> <p>Systematic Child Grade and Attendance Data Collection</p>	<p>LEAD</p> <p>Thorough Review of Study's Feedback and Suggestions Data with the Program Team</p>
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IDENTIFIED ACTION AREAS

Introduction

Purpose of this study

The Homeward Bound program, run by WoodGreen Community Services, is a four-year program designed to help inadequately housed or homeless mother-led families earn college diplomas and achieve economic and personal self-sufficiency. The Homeward Bound program has impacted around 400 mothers since its inception in 2004. With the average number of children per mother at 1.5, the program impacts approximately 50% more children than it does mothers. However, the understanding of that impact is limited or sometimes unverified as the direct focus of the program is on the empowerment of the participants. Although their and their children's wellbeing is inextricably linked, it is through supports for the mothers and their overall family's wellbeing that the children are reached. This study aimed to verify our perceived channels of impact, hear directly from the mothers and the children about how they feel they are impacted, lift the understanding and awareness of the program's impact on the children, and incorporate monitoring and evaluation processes of the children into the program's impact measurement activities to comprehend the deeper, longer, and inter-generational affects of Homeward Bound Toronto.

Background & research

To prepare for the execution of the study, to determine the major channels of impact, to build a semi-structured interview guide, and to ultimately construct a pre and post survey, our two interns (Vivian Huang and Malik Ali) looked into different ways to measure child wellbeing. They started by doing a literature review and looking into existing questionnaires on children. The metrics that other researchers have used tend to focus on the subjective well-being/happiness of the children, education/daycare, relationships, health, and stability, so these five areas became the five domains used in this study. The following questionnaires and studies were particularly helpful resources for this project.

Researchers used the Satisfaction with Life Scale-Child (SWLS-C) questionnaire to capture subjective well-being. This scale is between one to five, disagree a lot to agree a lot. The questions are based on how happy or satisfied the person feels¹. They also used the Subjective Happiness Scale to refer to happiness, which was captured under the subjective wellbeing domain. This scale has four items and a 7-point likert scale. The questions in this questionnaire are brief but have high internal validity, which was then suitable for different ages and cultures². There is also the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Short Form which rates happiness on a 6-point likert scale³. As for the health domain, a few questionnaires were relevant. The SiC Questionnaire is a guide for understanding levels of stress. Another study assessed the feasibility, reliability, and validity of both the CHQ-PF28 questionnaire and the 28-item short child health questionnaire parent form (both contain the same 13 scales, but only a subset of the items in the widely used 50 item CHQ-PF50)⁴. Lastly, the SAFE Stability Measure provided insights into measuring stability⁵. Additionally, there were other useful questionnaires that provided information and context across more than one domain, one of which is the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and covers topics such as emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour⁶. We then consolidated the academic research we gathered to start building an interview guide.

Some of these metrics did not necessarily only focus on the children, but could also focus on their mothers. How the mothers are doing impacts how the kids are doing, and how the family overall is doing. We also researched examples and details about topics we were asking questions about, to ensure that we could properly inform moms and that they would be clear on what we were asking. For example, the study *Measuring Children's Stress: An Evaluation of Methods* helped us understand and explain the different symptoms of stress in kids, such as checking in more often with their parent(s) and avoiding activities/places⁷.

After consolidating the research and building an interview guide, we talked to some Homeward Bound staff: Pauline Hockenstein, Director of Homeward Bound, Yordanka Petrova, Senior Manager of Homeward Bound, Alanna Kling, Manager of school-aged programming, and Lara Lukaniuk, Family Resource Counsellor. Their extensive experience with program

participants and their children means that they can support us in forming accurate questions to ask (and not to ask) the families. One of the helpful tips we received from staff was that kids will often give you the shortest/easiest answer (a “yes” or a “no”) when asked a question. Kids will also answer how they think you want them to answer, not necessarily what they actually feel or think. We were able to overcome this by asking them detailed questions that could not be answered with a “yes” or a “no”, such as who is your favourite teacher, tell me about your best friend, and what activities do you like doing with your mom? Another feedback was that kids’ answers will vary depending on their daily mood, so we added a question asking about how they are doing today so we can interpret their responses accordingly. Measuring the kids’ stress levels was an important aspect for us to understand and in addition to the aforementioned tips from our research, we were also given specifics from staff on how to recognize stress in kids that we could list for the moms if they were unsure how to answer questions on stress. Lastly, it was important not to ask too many questions about the family’s financial situation; They recommended we ask just one open-ended question and see how they respond and respect if they don’t engage/share any more. We also decided to ask them about this sensitive topic towards the end of the interview, after some rapport was established. Their feedback on the interview guide was of tremendous help and we were able to identify and edit the interview guide accordingly.

Methods

How the study was conducted

This study was the first dedicated effort by Homeward Bound Toronto to directly and comprehensively explore the impacts on the children in the program. A need for more insights on the program’s impact on children was first identified by the monitoring and evaluation consultant who conducted Homeward Bound’s five-year evaluation study in 2018. As such, we did not have a previous baseline to execute a highly effective quantitative survey and reasoned that a strong qualitative approach would yield more accurate and holistic insights. Then once the interviews were complete, we would have enough knowledge to build a sufficient quantitative pre- and post- survey on the children’s wellbeing, which will be incorporated into our program’s routine data collection processes.

The research team adopted a compassionate approach to our interviews, allowing venting, criticisms, and frank conversations. Participants who were happy and unhappy with the program were both interviewed; We did not select participants based on their sentiments towards the program but simply just the first to respond to our interview request who followed through with scheduling and attending an interview. We used a semi-structured interview guide to ensure the core topics were covered, but prioritized maintaining a natural conversational flow and giving time to whatever the participants wanted to share the most with us. In total, around 30 active and past participants initially responded with interest in participating, 17 interviews were actually scheduled and executed, of which 17 mothers and 8 children participated. Due to resource and time limits as well as scheduling conflicts, the option to share one’s thoughts through email correspondence (it was an open-ended call to share their thoughts on the impact the program had on their child/children’s wellbeing and a condensed version of the semi-structured interview guide was also sent to assist in their responses) was provided for 12 mothers, of which only one ended up contributing in this manner.

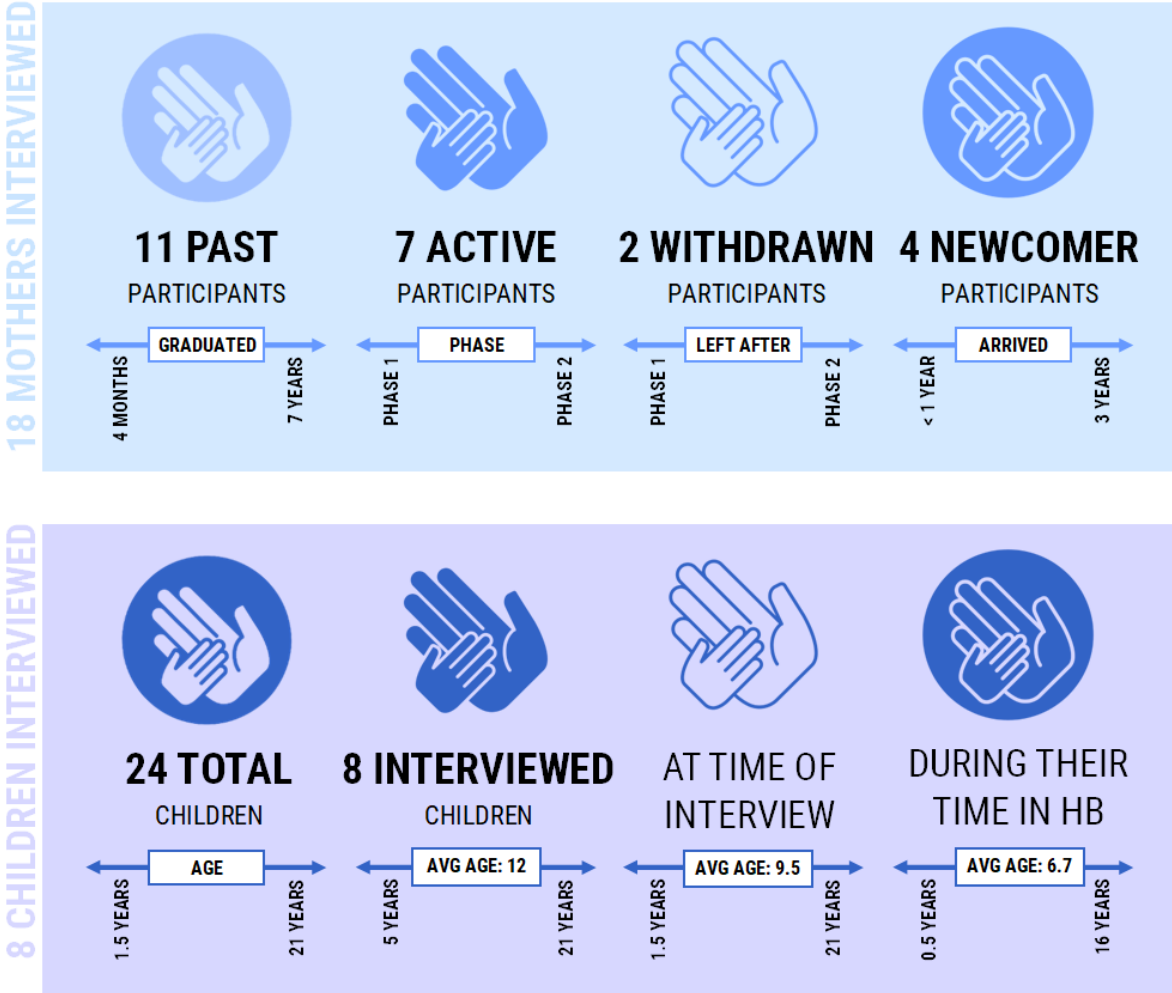
After completion of the interviews, each one was summarized and coded according to theme. A lot of data was captured including quite a bit outside the scope of this study; Many mothers shared details about their thoughts on aspects of the program that did not directly impact their children. However, better understanding the participant’s relationship with the program often helped paint a more complete picture of the overall family’s impact, and given that and our compassionate approach, this data was still collected. Thus although this data is not explicitly appearing in this report, these additional themes, recommendations, and feedback were sorted and used internally at WoodGreen for program and impact improvement purposes.

Additional existing data was combined into this study after realizing detailed information about educational improvements was lacking. Mothers often commented on how their children had improved academically in the program, but details on the quantity and type of improvements (and on attendance) were harder to obtain. However, detailed data on the tutoring program was available and was therefore incorporated into this study to provide helpful specifics.

The research team was led by myself, Christina Atkinson (Manager, Monitoring and Evaluation) with the support of two interns from our Project Management Office, Malik Ali and Vivian Huang. We kept the team small to retain confidentiality in which mothers participated. We did utilize other staff at WoodGreen to ask for feedback and advice in creating the semi-structured interview guide, including Pauline Hockenstein (Director, Homeward Bound and Neighbourhood Programs), Yordanka Petrova (Manager, Homeward Bound), Alanna Kling (Manager, School-Aged Programming), and Lara (Family Resource Counsellor).

Descriptive statistics on interviewees

The Homeward Bound Children Project was designed to be completely voluntary with no mandatory participation for active or past participants. So although we were not enforcing any sort of representative sample, we managed to attract a wide variety of program participants to take part in this study. It was great that we were able to naturally attract commentary from past and active participants, mothers with younger and older children, newcomer mothers, mothers who started the program outside of WoodGreen housing, and a wide range of children participants as well. The infographic below briefly summarizes some of the descriptive statistics for the mothers and children who participated in this project.



In addition to the above statistics, we also had four interviewed mothers who had begun Homeward Bound before moving into our housing buildings. This was due to challenges related to COVID-19 (including a temporary ban on evictions), as the flow of clients exiting/graduating our housing and entering/starting their four years of WoodGreen housing was disrupted (*Note: participants who faced this issue will still be allowed to remain in WoodGreen housing for their promised full four years; They will not need to leave after graduating but instead can use whatever is left of their allotted four years upon completion of the program, if they so choose*). For these participants, their experiences varied from others and their insights and commentary on it has been additional useful information for our team.

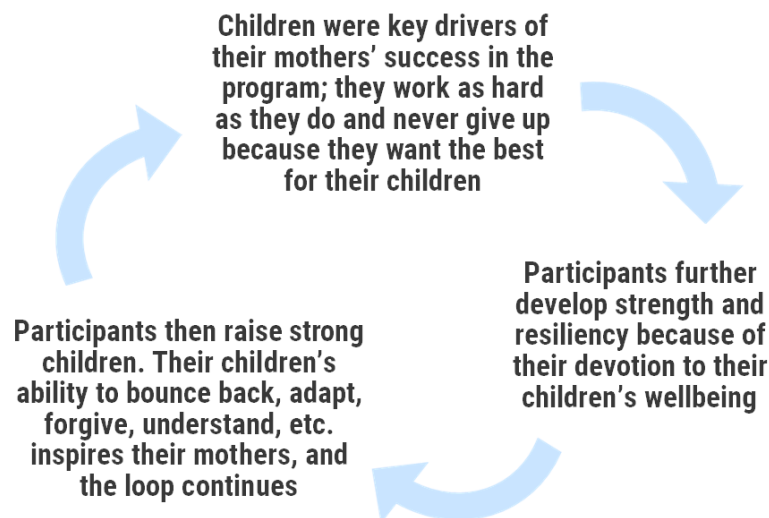
Results

The results of this study are divided into three sections. The first discusses the prevailing, overarching theme of interconnected mother and child wellbeing. The second discusses the main findings under each of the five studied domains: subjective wellbeing, relationships, education/daycare, health, and stability. Lastly, the areas of action are identified on how to truly apply this research, with the goal of sustainably incorporating the ongoing monitoring and evaluating of Homeward Bound’s impact on the participants’ children.

Results 1: Relationship between mother and child’s wellbeing

Throughout this study, it was difficult to separate the impact the program had on the children from the impact the program had on the mothers. These two impact channels always became intertwined by the end of a posed question or by the end of a topical conversation. This theme of interconnectedness between a Homeward Bound mother’s wellbeing and her child’s kept resurfacing, to the point where we realized it was more than a theme. It is a descriptor of the symbiotic relationship between mother and child’s wellbeing in the Homeward Bound program.

This relationship is a feedback loop that can start at any point. For example, one mother spoke about sitting in the bathroom of her room at a shelter, contemplating suicide. She was at her lowest point, unsure that she could continue facing the circumstances in her life. Then she heard her young child jumping on the bed in the other room, giggling away and contrasting her emotional state so much. What they had faced in the child’s short lifetime was all he knew, this was his “normal” and so his resiliency to it all was extreme. She said that she picked herself up and kept going for her child, and that his ability to not be phased by their hardships was a constant inspiration to her success. This story exemplifies the circular relationship Homeward Bound mothers and children face, as illustrated below.



Another mom echoed this sentiment of their child being their strongest motivating factor when things were difficult. She noted, “My child changed my life. We had multiple miscarriages before but having [my daughter] gave me what I needed in my life. There are some days when I don’t want to get out of bed but I do it for her”.

In the aforementioned stories, these moms were motivated to continue fighting for their family’s future wellbeing because they had to be there to protect their kids’ current wellbeing. These mothers choosing to get back up when they were knocked down helped develop their strength and resiliency as a person. As they kept going and raising their children, they fostered their kids’ qualities related to strength, adaptability, resiliency, understanding, and forgiveness. Strong and resilient mothers help raise strong and resilient children. Then the loop closes as mothers get re-inspired by how well their children fare during all the challenges they face together, and the cycle continues.

In every interview, either parts of this feedback loop or the entire feedback loop was explicitly apparent. It was one of the hardest sentiments to put into words, but it was also one of the strongest sentiments in this study. This relationship may not be apparent among all families or even all mother-led families, although we did conduct some research to see if our findings were consistent with other studies. One related study found that “both mother–child and father–child relationships may have short and long-term consequences for positive mental well-being”, which is consistent with our description of a closely intertwined, wellbeing relationship between mother and child⁸. Another study looked at single mothers (by choice, through donor-conception) and partnered mothers, finding that “the presence of two parents—or of a male parent—is not essential for children to flourish, and add to the growing body of evidence that family structure is less influential in children’s adjustment than the quality of family relationships”⁹. This is consistent with our finding that the relationship between mother and child in mother-led families is extremely central in the child’s wellbeing. Therefore, there is recorded evidence supporting the interconnectedness of mother and child wellbeing generally, and also specifically for the families in Homeward Bound.

Results 2: Top themes in each domain



This symbol denotes a top theme under a subtopic. It is meant to highlight some of the most pervasive comments and insights from our interviews.

Subjective Wellbeing

In this domain, we set out to understand how mothers and children open-endedly felt about their wellbeing. This included common markers such as happiness, emotional state, freedom, success, contentment, and generally whatever was most prominent in the interviewee’s life at the time of speaking. We kept this question under the broad category of wellbeing (as opposed to calling it happiness or breaking it down too minutely) because while being in the Homeward Bound program, many families are still in a stressful or critical state. The program involves *doing* the work to transform their lives; entering the program does not mean one has *arrived* at their steady state. Therefore, their happiness and stress may fluctuate or not be where they would like yet, but their wellbeing should be resetting to a course that is likely to make them land closer to where they want to be. In fact, some moms explicitly said this, stating that their lives were set for a completely different trajectory. But that having their child and participating in the Homeward Bound program has, for the better, set their life course in a very different and more ambitious direction.

It was also difficult to delineate mother’s wellbeing from their child’s, as explained in the previous Results 1 section. So although intertwined and closely related, we have separated out mothers’ wellbeing and children’s wellbeing, largely to keep the main focus of this study on the children.

1) CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

The top themes for the kids under this domain were often focused around the act of moving to and living in the Homeward Bound buildings because although the children participated in programming aspects of the program (such as After 4, tutoring, counselling, group activities, Saturday mentorship program, etc.), their moms were really the main participants of the Homeward Bound program. Therefore, they were more conscious of the tangible, direct impacts to them like their living situation.

- a. Most children and mothers rated that the children were happier in the program (for active participants) or after going through the program (for past participants). Reasons cited were because they had supports they wouldn't have gotten otherwise (After 4 program, tutoring program, community living, etc.), because they could socialize and build relationships with staff and other kids, and because they felt "freer" from the constraints their previous situations had (strict rules in shelters, small living spaces, abusive dads/mom's ex-partners, controlling relatives, etc.)
- b. Most children and mothers said that there was a lot of confusion at first for the kids and that it was hard to quickly accept the new changes of being in Homeward Bound. They also missed their friends, teachers, schools, and other familiarities. But the resiliency of the kids emerged and they adjusted over time; this new chapter of their life just became "normal"
- c. Every kid spoke of how much they enjoyed getting to have their own room, it was probably the greatest positive impact on their wellbeing that the kids were conscious of and could easily articulate to us. They spoke of not having to share it with others (like in a large common shelter space or sharing a room with their mom and/or other relatives) and that they could decorate it (such as getting multicoloured LED lights in their room like other kids have and that are trendy on TikTok). For one family, the mother was having trouble convincing her kids to get excited to move again, but once she took a video of the unit and showed it to them they were instantly sold with seeing their new, own rooms.
- d. The building and neighbourhood were also positive contributors to the children's wellbeing, according to the kids themselves. They felt it was a safe neighbourhood and one boy said that the people in the building were very closely bonded so it felt like a big family. A pair of preteen siblings from another family loved the fact that the units were not basement apartment and that there were parks close by.



2) MOTHERS' WELLBEING

How the mothers fare during the program does impact their children's wellbeing, whether directly or indirectly. A mother may be stressed out because of custody battle issues, but if the child is not privy to the details of the stress, they may just be impacted by their mother's stress in general. These are the top factors that mothers stated influenced their wellbeing:

- a. Some families were going through or went through divorces and/or custody battles when they entered the program. Their ex-partners were sometimes abusive, manipulative, and/or stacked with way more resources than the mothers had. Therefore, these legal fights could be lengthy and intense and especially in the case of one of the interviewees, became very complicated, vindictive, and extremely painful for the family. Handling all of this alongside the demands of the program is very stressful and challenging for moms.
- b. Homeward Bound is an intensive program that requires a lot of hard work, dedication, and commitment. This can be stressful for moms, perfectionist tendencies can kick in, and the pressure to meet all program milestones was noted as a lot to handle.
- c. Alongside general positive comments of the neighbourhood and size of units, there were some negative comments about the buildings made by the mothers. A notable example: one mother said that because others in the community knew the buildings were for a program for single moms, they would not treat the areas with respect and do things like not picking up after their pets only around their buildings.

- d. Friendships (or lack thereof) with other participants was something that really helped (or hindered) mothers' wellbeing. One mom mentioned that sometimes she is really friendly and other times she really isn't, which has made her work on mending some relationships while also building others. Another mom became really close to other participants, calling them "her sisters" because she realized everyone in the program is in a similar boat. And another mom noted that maintaining the relationships you have is so important for her family's wellbeing.
- e. There were also some general positive comments on how the program overall improved the mothers' wellbeing. One mom said that the program was great right from the beginning – immediately beneficial. Another mom was very nervous to start especially with the demanding schedule, she thought, "Can I do this?". But once she began, she found the content so interesting (especially the life skills courses and financial education) and she felt that finally her "brain isn't idle anymore".
- f. One of the largest themes under this subtopic is that moms really loved being able to be independent and parent on their own terms. They have control over how to parent their child; no live-in relatives, abusive partners, etc. to take away their control. They can sleep train their babies if they want to, they can avoid constant judgement of their parenting in their home, there is "no one here to sabotage me" anymore, and they "feel like [they] are getting some of [their] life back".



SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IMPACT STATEMENT: Homeward Bound provides an opportunity for increased independence for children and mothers, leading to self-reported improved wellbeing.

Relationships

Throughout every domain, interviewees brought up various relationships that were prominent in their lives during the program, as they clearly felt they were directly connected to the family's wellbeing. We also often inquired about the relationship between mother and child during the interview process as not only did understanding this dynamic help us interpret both mom and child's responses better, but it also led us to uncover more details on how the relationship between mother and child's wellbeing is interconnected (*Results 1* section).

1) CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS

For children, four central relationships were most common: with their teachers, with other children (in Homeward Bound, at school/daycare, and with their siblings), with their father, and with their mother.

- a. No issues with teachers were provided, and some highlights of great teachers were mentioned. The children interviewed could name teachers they liked at school easily.
- b. Generally, Homeward Bound kids were able to get along with each other and others in daycare or school. Any problems were on a one-on-one level (such as one child being inappropriate with one other at one time) or because of a diagnosis, such as autism spectrum disorder.
- c. Many kids involved in this study did not have siblings, but for those that did, they spoke of typical sibling relationships. Comments about their siblings included fighting and older siblings preferring when they didn't have younger siblings. Moms tried to spend one-on-one time with each child to help mitigate the latter comment. Siblings also spoke about sticking together to handle the transition of entering the program and daily transitions from school to After 4 care. Siblings also said they liked to be at the same school.
- d. The children who I spoke to all expressed good relationships with their mothers, that they talked to each other a lot, and that they felt they could go to their mom if they had any problems (although one teenager remarked, "not every problem!"). One son said that their mom was "fun and nice" and that he enjoyed it better before his younger sister came along and he had her all to himself. One mom told us her son "all the time says he loves mommy". They also displayed notions of pride and respect for their moms




for how hard they work in the program, and seeing their moms work hard at school was motivating for the children to work hard at school too.

- e. Cited activities that mother and child did together included cooking/baking and watching cooking/baking shows, going to the beach and parks, dancing together, taking long walks, participating in religious activities together, learning/practicing native languages, photography, gardening, watching movies, and doing group program activities together like BBQ's, camping trips, and communal/holiday dinners.
- f. Comments on the relationship between child and father were pretty minimal, mostly comments that either their fathers were not in their lives or the relationship with their father improved/started improving once beginning the program. One mother noted that her son didn't have a good relationship with his father, but she still told him to respect him as a parent, and he did until he passed away in 2021.

2) MOTHER'S RELATIONSHIPS

Although the most relevant relationship for mothers in the context of this study is their relationship with their child, mothers' relationships with other participants, romantic partners, relatives, and other communities did impact their children's wellbeing.

- a. All moms expressed their love for their relationship with their child/children, saying comments like "we are like besties", "we have an amazing relationship", and "our relationship has always been good, he's my only child so he gets all my love". Mothers particularly love when they got to talk with their child, like during morning and evening routines or activities like cooking and baking together. One mother said that in the program, she was able to be closer to her children, show them a lot more love, and to appreciate what they have; Generally, be more of the parent she wants to be.
- b. With everything going on in their lives, it was difficult for moms to build any relationship, let alone friends. However, many were able to lean on other participants, especially in the beginning of the program. Social activities were great for bonding and the moms help each other out by taking care of each others kids and cooking together. There were definitely conflicts, although many said that they tried to "stay out of the drama" if they could. Conflicts were often noted as about racial issues, bullying, behavioural clashes, and little chemistry between participants (more details of these conflicts are in the feedback and suggestions sheets shared internally with program staff). These conflicts were difficult for moms to deal with and their children were impacted by these conflicts, directly or indirectly. One mom noted that this was bad role modelling for the children to see how some of the moms behaved towards each other as it reiterated negative actions and ideas, especially when race was involved. 
- c. Some moms said they stayed single during the program so they could just focus on the program/their job and their child/children ("I stayed single and my whole focus was my son and my job").
- d. If moms were coming from a previously tight knit community, it was hard for them to socially start all over again at Homeward Bound, even if they knew they would end up with a tight knit community again.
- e. For those that did have family in the city, it was helpful for them to lean on them for babysitting. However, many moms such as newcomer moms or those who were fleeing abusive situations, did not have those supports.

RELATIONSHIPS IMPACT STATEMENT: Homeward Bound allows for a space where mother-child relationships can continue to flourish and be strong.

Education/Daycare

A central part of any child's life is schooling, but depending on their age, some children are not school-aged for all or part of their time at Homeward Bound. Therefore, this section will describe the top school or daycare related themes, depending on what was applicable to the study participants.

1) SWITCHING SCHOOLS/DAYCARE

One theme that crosses both of these spaces is the challenges of switching schools or daycares when the family enters the program. Often families are coming from other parts of the city and so starting the program requires switching schools/daycare. This switching actually proved to not be as challenging as the research team initially hypothesized because:

- a. Some children were so young that switching daycares did not significantly affect them
- b. Some children were at a transition age when entering the program (such as between daycare and kindergarten, or between middle school and high school) so a switching of schools/daycare was always anticipated
- c. Some children had switched schools/daycares many times already, so actually being at the same institution for the four years of the program was educationally stabilizing

Two kids, age 11 and 12, said that switching schools "was okay, it was alright". Although it wasn't cited in general as a major hurdle, this is not to say that switching wasn't challenging for some. One kid, age 5, switched to a Catholic school once starting the program which he did not particularly like and left him with some catching up to do. Another, aged 4 when starting the program, struggled with the switching between daycare and elementary school. Common challenges related to switching daycares/schools included:

- d. Missing their friends when they left their previous schools/daycares (although mothers liked their kids leaving certain friends if they had been "bad influences")
- e. Separation anxiety was quite common, which didn't affect their grades but did affect their behaviours. One mom felt really bad when her kid would cry when she dropped her off at daycare; Eventually the child could self-entertain and became more independent. Another older child would call her mom after getting dropped off at school and say "Don't leave me"; Eventually she channelled her anxiety through singing and art. Additionally, this separation anxiety could also refer to being separated from siblings if once switching schools, they no longer attended the same school.
- f. Some moms really liked the schools or daycares their kids previously attended, and so switching to ones they preferred less was not ideal. For example, one centre sent pictures everyday, provided child logs, and coordinated naps on days where the child didn't sleep well. These additional features were missed by the mom when they switched to Homeward Bound's Debbie Yeung childcare.
- g. It was a challenge for kids who ended up becoming the minority at their new school in terms of race and/or wealth. Two daughters, aged 7 and 14, were the only two Black kids in their new school. They felt peer pressure to fit in and wanted to straighten their hair and have designer clothes like the wealthier kids.



2) IMPROVED SKILLS IN DAYCARE

Nearly ever mom said that their child's skills improved in the daycare centre, specifically in these areas:

- a. Vocabulary. A 3-year-old boy's vocabulary regressed due to COVID-19 when their library was shut down and he couldn't interact with other kids. His mother put him into daycare (which she wouldn't have done if it wasn't for Homeward Bound) and he developed better vocabulary to communicate with teachers and parents. He is doing a speech and language development program that is helping him be where he needs to be now.
- b. Reading. In grade 1/2, one boy had trouble reading and so the daycare centre put him into a reading program that really helped him. Coupled with his mom getting him to read every day, he is doing well.



- c. Behavioural issues. The daycare has a resource counsellor who comes in and observes the children's behaviour and attitudes. One child had issues sitting still and didn't like anything so the resource counsellor asked if she could observe him. The mother agreed and then was given methods on how to help him improve, which his mom says still works great even till today. And after 6 months, he didn't need to be observed anymore.
- d. Learning to self-entertain. Aforementioned, separation anxiety was common but daycare was able to help the young children learn to be more independent and develop self-entertainment skills to overcome this anxiety.

3) FEEDBACK ON DEBBIE YEUNG CHILDCARE CENTRE

This study captured detailed negative feedback on the Debbie Yeung childcare centre. This feedback was often specific to individual cases, sometimes identifying, and sometimes outside of the direct scope of this study, so it is not included here, but instead was (more productively) disseminated to the program staff for review and action. Some feedback that is appropriate to publicly share include:

- a. Having childcare as a part of the program and having it nearby was very helpful for the busy participants
- b. Help in applying for school was useful, especially for newcomer moms
- c. Support from the resource counsellor and social workers on their children's behavioural issues were greatly appreciated

4) SCHOOLING FROM HOME DURING COVID-19

This study was able to capture some unique data related to the effects of COVID-19 on the children, one of which is virtual education. Comments included:

- a. It was challenging for moms to focus on their own Homeward Bound work (Life Skills courses, their college education, internships, etc.) while their children were at home during the workday, but they did like being able to pop-in and check on them throughout the day
- b. The school supplies and supports, including computers and the online tutoring program, were really helpful in keeping their kids engaged and off of TikTok all day
- c. For those who started the program during COVID-19 and therefore started at new schools virtually, the kids said it was okay, they were able to make some friends virtually, and they liked that they could connect with new friends not just in Toronto but in other places and countries

5) IMPROVED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE

One of the most significant impacts that Homeward Bound has on the participating children is, no doubt, the improved school performance. Specifically, we mean improved behavioural/social skills, improved attendance rates, and improved grades. The first point, improved behavioural/social skills, is described under the previous section 2) *Improved skills in daycare*; These skills begin being improved in daycare (especially with the help of our resource counsellor), but continue into school-age as well, of which some evidence of these improvements is recorded in the *Learning Skills and Work Habits* portion of children's report cards.

According to program staff, children's school attendance rates vastly improved after starting in Homeward Bound. The challenges, instability, trauma, and precarious housing that families faced before entering the program often made it difficult for children to have strong attendance records. However, concrete quantitative data of lates and absences has not been systematically collected (except for strong attendance rates for tutoring sessions). Although we have no doubt that school attendance has improved, having stronger data to back up these empirical testimonies is needed. (*We do note, however, that teacher strikes and inconsistencies between school boards' and teachers' attendance recording practices impact our ability to accurately obtain this data*). In the final results section of this study, a call to action to put in place a consistent process for recording such data is put forth.

Lastly, we have improvements in grades. Homeward Bound has several supports to help improve children's grades including homework help during the After 4 program, drop-in tutoring sessions, and the one-on-one tutoring program. Tutors track the improvements of those kids in the one-on-one program through report cards, frequent literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessments, and individual learning goals. This data shows these improvements in academic performance, but could also benefit from some standardizing and organizing so this data can be tracked in a clearer, more consistent way (tutors intimately know this information as they work directly with the children, but standard recording and sharing practices should be implemented; Again, more details on this action area is in the final results section).

Despite recommending some improvements in academic data collection, we do have some solid data from the tutoring program that paints a clear picture of the positive impact Homeward Bound has on the educational wellbeing of the children. The tutoring program is open to participants' kids and operates through one-on-one sessions 2-3 times per week and through drop-in sessions. Conventionally, there are three tutoring terms, each 3 months in length during the school year of September to June. Areas of focus include mathematical processes, language development, and social emotional learning skills. Monthly lesson plans and learning goals are developed based on results from assessment tests, IEP's, report cards, attendance, parent-teacher meetings, and personal matters. Progress on meeting these learning goals is measured against repeated assessment tests and report cards. Overall, students and parents comment that the individualized attention of the tutoring program helps strengthen subject comprehension, boost confidence, and build important learning skills. Students also improve their self-motivation and engagement levels because of the shift from passive to active participation in learning. The pandemic disrupted the normal operation of this program so our data from the last two school years is not complete, but it still provides wonderful insights and evidence into how impactful these supports really are to the children.

2019-2020 (September 2019 to March 2020) – In-person

- Program was terminated at the onset of COVID (March 4, 2020) and online options were not immediately available as Homeward Bound families only had one computer, which mothers needed to complete their courses, internships, etc.
- 9 students were in the one-on-one tutoring, attending 3 hours/sessions per week (sometimes they would also attend drop-in sessions)
- 5 students per day on average in drop-in sessions, which consist of homework help and skill building activities
- On average, students improved their test scores by between 20-40%
- Students improved their concentration/attention, had sustained interest with the use of breaks and snacks, and maintained their motivation through the use of rewards for meeting goals
- There are attitudes and absences that can get in the way, but if students did not attend school for whatever reason, they were always still allowed to come to tutoring. It wasn't uncommon for a student to miss school one day a week for therapy and then come to tutoring after as to still get educational support that day

2021 (February to June 2021) – Online only

- By February 2021, we were able to successfully move the program online. Two terms were able to run
- The drop-in sessions did not run largely due to logistics. We suspect the greatest impact of not having the drop-in sessions on the kids is that these sessions helped a lot of kids with time management as they could start their homework during the After 4 program and ask tutors (instead of their moms) for assistance
- 11 students were in the one-on-one tutoring, attending 2-3 sessions/hours per week
- Attendance rates are well over 98% as we found that the virtual setting allowed fewer distractions and rescheduling sessions was easier to accommodate if need be

- 95% of students successfully achieved their learning goals (Report card data was often inaccurate during the pandemic as it was a challenging time to grade students, so our learning goal achievement data is a good measure of academic success during this period of time)
- Despite the challenges of COVID-19, it was a very successful tutoring year

During our interviews, mothers often echoed these findings above, saying how helpful these educational supports were for their children. Some used drop-in sessions when needed and others had children who were in the one-on-one sessions.

- “Homeward Bound has been really helpful. They do tutoring and the tutors have been so nice. They taught my kids all through last year. It was so helpful. They did ICL and math. They kept them off TikTok”
- “The tutoring program helped him when he was struggling with reading, and it boosted his confidence. He always looked back at it. If he didn’t have that support, he would’ve been further back in school. The tutors were school teachers so they understood what was behind the diagnosis. He had a learning disability”
- “The tutoring was really nice, I was struggling and having the resources was useful”

EDUCATION IMPACT STATEMENT: Homeward Bound’s educational and behavioural supports help many children improve their grades, learning skills, attendance, and behaviours, especially the tutoring program and childcare’s resource counsellor.

Health

Health is a huge category to tackle, especially without medical records or other data sets. Using the subjective responses of our study participants, our health discussions centred around healthy eating, physical health, and mental health. Through our research, we knew that stress would be something we wanted to hear about when measuring children’s wellbeing, but we also knew it would be difficult to capture. We provided some examples of recognizing stress in children to moms if relevant, and asked about symptoms of stress showing up in different scenarios and situations. Most of these findings ended up falling into the health domain.

1) HEALTHY EATING

At WoodGreen, food insecurity was put at the forefront of our attention when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. So many of our clients, across so many different types of programming, faced food insecurity. With these thoughts in our minds, as well as the clear connection between nutrition and children’s health, we had fruitful discussions with the study participants about healthy eating during their time in Homeward Bound.

- a. One mom provided great commentary on how fast food played a smaller role in her family’s nutrition once entering the Homeward Bound program. They spent more money eating out in the shelter they were at before the program, because the shelter food was a hit or miss. They had to eat a lot of fast food, it was their main source of nutrients, and it wasn’t good for them. They couldn’t cook their own meals in the shelter because it was a hotel room (no kitchen). Her three-year-old son would eat chicken nuggets every single meal. Then when arriving at Homeward Bound, she could finally make breakfast for him. She also can now stretch her money a bit more to buy groceries and she feels much healthier in Homeward Bound than she did in the shelter.
- b. The Second Harvest support had mixed reviews from participants, but all of them appreciated that it was an option they could take advantage of if they wanted to.
- c. Growing one’s own food was actually an option for moms if they wanted to, as one family was able to secure a local community plot. This increased their family’s consumption of nutritious foods, reduced their food costs, and provided a great bonding activity for her and her daughters (“We like to walk to the garden and look forward to talking to gardeners who would give us vegetables”).

- d. Moms noted that it was hard to keep kids eating healthy while co-parenting and having their kids in daycare a lot of the time. “Daycare and her dad made her not like vegetables. She would not eat meat or vegetable. She only likes carb and fruits. Sometimes she would say that she wants to eat something but when mom made it, she doesn’t want it anymore”.
- e. Moms felt that if they weren’t eating healthy, it was not an issue of access to healthy food but instead difficulty in having the time to make food for their family. This also includes all the time it takes to go grocery shopping with a stroller for those with young kids – “Grocery shopping was difficult when she was in a stroller. I can’t push a cart and stroller at the same time”.
- f. Living on their own (not with family members, in shelters, or with others) allowed freedom over feeding their kids which was good, although some children got spoiled by relatives’ home cooking great meals that moms can’t do on their own while in the program – “My daughter is really picky eater, she likes really big Caribbean meals, got spoiled by her grandmother”.



2) PHYSICAL HEALTH

There are many measures of physical health so discussions about this topic with the interviewees was kept open-ended and broad. There were no major physical health challenges shared with the research team, but a couple themes are worth noting:

- a. When asked, both moms and kids said the kids were generally active. The kids talked about sports they liked and moms talked about getting them into recreational clubs and actively playing with them in public parks. Moms did feel guilty about not always being available to play with their kid due to the demands of the program and of being a single parent: “There were days that I didn’t have much time to play with him, it was just drop off, pick up, dinner and homework. It was hard being a single parent, there was no one to pick him up and play with him. I felt guilty. It was only certain semesters, not majority of the program”. The pandemic also restricted available sports leagues and spaces to exercise for kids: “I want him to be more involved with sports, to teach him more structure, when COVID cools down”.
- b. For the younger children, sleeping was something we discussed a lot with the moms and most children slept okay. For the children who had trouble sleeping before the moms entered Homeward Bound, it appeared to improve during the program as the children got older, but also because of improved independence for moms. A mom with a 19-month old child wanted to sleep train her, but her mom wouldn’t let her when they were living together so it took her four hours to get her daughter to sleep. Once entering the program, she no longer had her mom interrupting 10 minutes into the crying it out method. She was able to finally execute sleep training and improve both her and her daughter’s health.
- c. No major physical health challenges were mentioned for the children. A few were mentioned for the mothers though, which impacted their children. One mom had her hair falling out in clumps due to stress, but after 6-8 months in the program, her hair was growing and healthy. Another mom faced a significant mobility issue during the program where she temporarily needed a wheelchair. Issues of accessibility were very challenging for the family and she ended up withdrawing from the program (more information on this is in the feedback and recommendations shared with the Homeward Bound team).



3) MENTAL HEALTH

Both the mental health of mothers and children were considered within the scope of the study. It is important to emphasize that many families in the Homeward Bound program have faced trauma or continue to face trauma. For the children, the following comments were made:

- a. Several children in this study had significant mental health challenges that impacted their daily wellbeing. A few had diagnosed conditions and others faced situational problems.
 - “The mental health has not been easy for my son, living in a place without extended family” (aged 5)

- One child was diagnosed with ADHD and attends a special education program
 - A 10-year-old daughter has autism and requires expensive and extensive therapies. The government only covers about \$5,000 annually, which her mother said only covers about four months of her treatments
 - One mother shared that when her son was 7 years old and during the pandemic, he was suicidal. Speaking to Homeward Bound's family support worker was a helpful support, but the family was leaving the program as this was occurring. Therefore the support was there, but only for a certain amount of time
- b. There were also comments made about how their children's mental health had improved during their time in the program. Most comments were broad, stating that overall the family was better in the program, and therefore their children's mental health was better. Others were more specific: "Their mental health is so far so good. Anxiety I would say yes, because they didn't know who they'll meet when they had to move. They are relaxed now. They are able to integrate now and everyone is like them. Their anxiety was higher before the program, but now it's kind of reduced", "He was very young but he still remembered how hard it was to transition from the shelter, the mental state like the anxiety. He was able to learn how to cope with certain things"

And mirroring the previous two themes, mothers also faced mental health challenges and also spoke of some improvements they experienced while being a part of the program.

- c. The most common comments about mothers' poor mental health was that many suffered from high levels of stress ("Oh, for sure"), some felt they needed psychotherapy (which they were able to access for free through Homeward Bound), and one faced severe depression with suicidal thoughts. One participant told us the very personal story of her lowest point (also described in the *Results 1* section). She was crying in the washroom of the shelter her and her 3-year-old son were staying in. As she sat there, suicidal thoughts kept flooding over her – she did not want to go on. But then she heard her son, jumping on the bed in the other room, laughing away. It hit her – she could not give up on herself because that meant giving up on her son. He didn't have any other family here to take care of him but her, so she picked herself up and pushed onwards. Her son is the reason she is here today.
- During our research, we read a study that found single mothers of young children to be "twice as likely to report depressive or anxiety symptoms than partnered mothers", that "past exposure to maltreatment and inadequate social support significantly increase the likelihood of general and parenting stress", and that "migrant background, young maternal age and having a toddler-aged child contribute to depressive, anxiety and general stress symptoms"¹⁰. Many of these descriptions apply to our participants, so our findings of mental health challenges for some of our moms is consistent with existing research.
- d. Mothers also spoke about their mental health improving during the program. One interviewee described her experience: "Having a goal to finish school helped me mentally and I became a better mom, which helped [her 8-year-old son] to become better mentally. It helped me become a better parent to have good mental health. That transpired to my son and he is a very happy kid".

Mothers also made some wider comments related to their family's overall mental health, including escaping negative relatives and how spirituality played a positive role in them and their kids' lives.

- e. The collective mental health of some families was also improved when they started Homeward Bound and were able to distance themselves from relatives who negatively impacted their mental health. One participant said she has moved out twice from her mom because her attitude is "really bad sometimes and distance benefits them better". Her mom is hyper critical and she could never just "walk away" from her in the small apartment they shared – she was always "still in someone's space". Her mental health is much better after moving out and being in a better mental state has helped her improve the process of putting her daughter to sleep. Finally, "No one was barking at her".

- f. A few moms mentioned how their spirituality really helped keep their family healthy. “My faith, my church and my relationship with God had been critical, without that nothing would sink in. Me and my son [aged 5] would go to the church every Sunday, it just happened when I moved into the program. The Sunday school was very helpful”; “We have night prayer days every week where we talk about friends, bullying and other things while watching videos about them. It’s not just praying but we also talk about other things like a family while eating and enjoying pizza and other things.”

HEALTH IMPACT STATEMENT: Homeward Bound’s nutrition and mental health supports helped maintain or improve the overall health of the participants and their kids. The independence and freedom that comes with the family’s own space and kitchens also contributed to healthier physical and mental states.

Stability

In our research, stability was noted as an important factor in child wellbeing. It is a challenging domain to measure separately, as forms of stability can show up in so many of the previously listed domains. So although stability is already implicitly captured in many of our aforementioned themes, financial stability and direct comments about stability in general are worth calling out in their own domain below.

1) FINANCIAL STABILITY

The families in Homeward Bound are, by eligibility, currently facing or at risk of homelessness and on social assistance. Asking about financial information can be very sensitive, so the mothers were extremely generous in sharing the information they did.

- a. Most moms said they were financially comfortable during the program – either in the same or in a better financial situation than before starting the program. Those who felt that their financial situation was the same said comments such as “it was hard to be on social support” and “there was never a time that I didn’t feel tight on money. It’s just like living paycheque to paycheque”. Others said they “didn’t feel deprived of anything” during their time in the program and were even able to have some niceties, like adopting two bunnies which “felt great” for that family. “I would have been stuck financially” if it weren’t for Homeward Bound, said another. Two financial supports in the program were particularly called out as helpful: having free items and activities provided to the families and having their rent significantly lower than market rates. One interviewee said the program helped fill in the gaps for things she couldn’t afford as she was living on the bare minimum during the program, such as Christmas gifts for her kids, clothes, and back to school supplies. Echoing that sentiment, another mom said she is able to stretch her money further now and not stress about money as much since being in the program, despite her financial situation not actually altering. As for rent, it was reduced from \$1400-\$1500 to \$300 for one family, which made a massive difference for them. Another mom mentioned how she was able to make her rent payments now and not have to hide eviction notices from her children anymore.
- A study we found during our background research looked at the work life and mental wellbeing of single mothers in Scandinavia and concluded that even such strong welfare states as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were unable to successfully relieve the financial pressures faced by single working mothers¹¹. In this finding that governments need better financial support for single mothers, you can see how a program like Homeward Bound has a significant place in supporting these moms that wouldn’t necessarily otherwise be met.
- b. Some participants were going through or had gone through a divorce when entering the program. This meant a jarring and immediate loss of income and partnership, vastly impacting their financial stability. One mom said after being separated and kicked out of her house by her now ex-husband, she was left with nothing and had to go

straight to a shelter with her son. Another mom said that when she was married, she was part of a team. Then post-divorce, she had to work night shifts so she could be there in the morning for her kids.

- c. All mothers said the financial education pieces of the program were very key to improving their family's wellbeing. They spoke of the great benefits of learning how to budget and how to save, even if it is just a little bit every month. Many participants spoke of starting to save once they began the program, having not prioritized or been able to do so before the program.
- d. Alumni were able to provide interesting insights into the long-term effects of the program on their financial situations. They remarked that it was tough being thrown back into the real world without the Homeward Bound financial supports once the program ended, but those that were a few years out from graduating told stories of great financial success. A mom mentioned that she can now afford to buy more things for her son that he really wants. One was able to buy her first car, a big accomplishment for her. Another was able to buy a home for her and her two children. A mom who graduated five years ago said that the financial education she received in Homeward Bound was helpful and she shared her knowledge with her daughters. She is now independent and she rates her financial stability as "really good".
- e. Related to the previous alumni comments on the rough financial transition when leaving the program, one mom explained the nuances of this transition well: "It was scary at first when we finished the program because there wasn't any finance or emotional support. The upside was that I didn't have to worry about food and I got education, and this was stress free. The downside was I felt that I was depending too much on someone else". This challenging sentiment of feeling dependent during the program (but appreciating and needing the support) versus feeling alone and unsupported after the program (but appreciating independence) is a complex but very real emotion for alumni.
- f. In order to bolster their financial stability, some moms would have preferred to be permitted to also work while in the program (this comment isn't including the unpaid internship portion of the program).



2) STABILITY IN GENERAL

We also inquired about whether moms felt that participating in the program helped improve the stability of their family in general, and specifically helping their children feel more stable.

- a. Moms remarked that the program was able to give them a bit of a break from the real world so they could get their life back together. "I need the stability of the four years to feel sane"; "Before the program it was stress, bad self-esteem, and everything, but when I got into the program all that was cut down in half. I like the stability I got and it's all because of Homeward Bound and I'm grateful for that."
- b. Being affordably housed in the same place for four years and not being in a shelter or around controlling relatives was very stabilizing for families. "I think stability was very beneficial. [My son] was very young but he still remembered how hard it was to transition from the shelter, the mental state like the anxiety. He was able to learn how to cope with certain things"; "The stability will be really good. I had stability with my mom, but a lot of limitation. Their grandmother would tell my kid not to do a lot of things. Now my kid knows which area is hers... More stable".



STABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT: Homeward Bound's four-year, supportive environment allowed families to have a break from repeatedly moving, from sky-high rents, and from difficult living situations and relationships. This allowed a bit of a break from the real world so that they could "feel sane" again.

Results 3: Identified areas of action

This report began a deeper conversation about the impact that Homeward Bound has on the participants' children. However, conducting a study of this kind yearly is not an efficient monitoring and evaluation solution to understanding our impact on

the children. This section puts forth three actionable areas where we can strengthen our continued understanding of this topic and accomplish a sustainable impact measurement strategy for the kids of Homeward Bound.

1) INDOCTRINATED PRE AND POST SURVEY ON CHILD WELLBEING

The main area of action is creating a pre/post-survey for all participants and their children (if age appropriate) to fill out when they start the program, when they complete the program (about four years later), and again four years after graduating. This was first a hypothesized idea that became confirmed and refined after executing the study. Based on our findings under each of the domains and the background research we conducted, we are well positioned to advise what questions are most pertinent and fruitful for this survey. Implementing this standardized process of monitoring and evaluating the Homeward Bound children's wellbeing will remove the need for such an in-depth study as this one to be performed annually. This questionnaire is in development at the time of writing.

2) SYSTEMATIC GRADE AND ATTENDANCE DATA COLLECTION

Under the education/daycare section of the soon to be implemented survey, questions regarding attendance and grades will be included. This information can be difficult to accurately obtain for all children in the program, however, those kids in the tutoring program are normally able to provide their report cards with the correct numbers/letters on absences, lates, subjects, and learning skills. Therefore, the current process of recording this information can be adapted to be consistent with the questionnaire, clearly accessible to staff, and routinely and systematically updated.

3) THOROUGH REVIEW OF FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS BY PROGRAM TEAM

Aforementioned, this study collected a lot of data that was helpful context and knowledge, but could not be included in the main scope of this study. This does not mean it is irrelevant, it is very useful for the optimal operation of the program and some of it is very much related to the wellbeing of the children in Homeward Bound. However, this feedback is often quite identifying and personal to the interviewees as well as influenced by their particular family's needs and experiences. Instead of sharing the feedback and suggestions here in this report, the third area of action is to spend some time with the Homeward Bound team to properly review this data. We will go through each comment, discuss it together, and determine if there are next steps to be taken to address it. This way, the correct people with an informed understanding of the program will be purposeful and thoughtful about these comments, while still being realistic to the realities of non-profit programming. This meeting is scheduled for January 2022.

Conclusion

This study aimed to increase WoodGreen Community Services's understanding of the impact the Homeward Bound program has on the children of the participants. Before this study, some data and plenty of empirical themes were well known by the program team, but little had been done to organize, analyze, and formalize this knowledge. Thus, a deeper look into the impact the program has on the children was recommended and resources were eventually acquired to execute this study. We are proud to present these results in this report and to continue moving forward in our understanding, now fully equipped with background research, insights from subject matter experts, first hand qualitative data from real program participants (including some from the actual study population themselves – the children), quantitative academic data, and actionable next steps (including detailed program feedback and suggestions).

Now that this study has been completed, the next steps are vital. The first two actionable areas above will solidify the results of this study into ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes. In a way, this study will be recreated, bit by bit, every time data is recorded through the pre/post survey and systematized tutoring data collection. These practices will ensure this work lives on and builds, but we do acknowledge that it will take time to accumulate more data and insights.

As for the third actionable area of thoughtfully reviewing all feedback and suggestions, this will really set the stage for additional next steps. The action items and priorities that result from our feedback and suggestions meeting in January

2022 will determine what changes may be made to the program, which will then alter some of the impact on mothers and (directly or indirectly) on their children. We look forward to this work.

Our Impact Statements (repeated)

Homeward Bound provides an opportunity for increased independence for children and mothers, leading to self-reported improved wellbeing.

Homeward Bound allows for a space where mother-child relationships can continue to flourish and be strong.

Homeward Bound's educational and behavioural supports help many children improve their grades, learning skills, attendance, and behaviours, especially the tutoring program and childcare's resource counsellor.

Homeward Bound's nutrition and mental health supports helped maintain or improve the overall health of the participants and their kids. The independence and freedom that comes with the family's own space and kitchens also contributed to healthier physical and mental states.

Homeward Bound's four-year, supportive environment allowed families to have a break from repeatedly moving, from sky-high rents, and from difficult living situations and relationships. This allowed a bit of a break from the real world so that they could "feel sane" again.

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