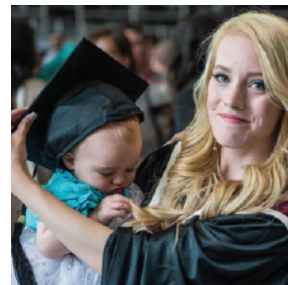


Alberta's Learner's Bursary

Strengthening Hope for Pregnant and Parenting Teens



**HIGH SCHOOL
COMPLETION**



**SELF-
CONFIDENCE**



ATTENDANCE

ENGAGEMENT



RETENTION

**POST SECONDARY
EDUCATION**



CAREER PLANNING



The Challenge

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Strengthening Hope for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

- » “Maelle is an 18 year old refugee from Africa, who has been in Canada since she was 4, and is parenting her 20 month old daughter. She began at the school in the fall on a Learner's Bursary. The support has allowed her to make more independent decisions. She has worked with her social worker around relationship issues, as she was involved with an abusive partner. Attendance and academic progress were initially tenuous, but as a result of finding stable, affordable housing and financial independence it helped her make the decision to get out of her abusive relationship. She is now working with her social worker to increase her confidence and to lessen her anxiety in using community childcare.”
- » “In June 2013, 17 year old Jackie, who was pregnant and due on September 8, registered at the school. She already had 60 credits and was approved for Learner's Bursary funding. When she applied Jackie was living with her boyfriend, soon after she decided to end the abusive relationship. She first lived in a shelter and then with assistance from the Fleeing Abuse Fund she was able to move into subsidized housing, along with her child. Jackie worked with an Outreach Worker to deal with custody issues, set-up a new home for herself and her child and re-establish her academic program so that she could complete the last of her credits required to obtain her diploma. Jackie graduated in July 2014, having obtained 40 credits in 23 months. Following her graduation she was accepted into a hairstyling program.”

The Challenge

Lower than desired high-school completion rates among Alberta's pregnant and parenting teens.



Recent research had shown that high school completion among pregnant and parenting teens was less than a third that of regular high schools.¹

¹ Mondor, Andrea (2009) *New Potential: Improving High School Completion Rates of Pregnant and Parenting Teens*. Edmonton: Terra-Centre for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Recent Research

- » A recent Canadian study demonstrated that the costs of not completing high school, borne by individuals and Canadian society, are very significant. The study estimated that for each high school non-completion the individual lifetime costs would be in the range of \$325,000.² Consequently by increasing the number of high school graduates by just 1% it would result in cost savings of \$7.7 billion.
- » A study prepared by the Calgary United Way in 2011 noted that not completing a high school education 'contributes to lower earnings, higher risk of job loss, fewer benefits and lower level of savings over time'. For example in 2000 75% of single parents who did not graduate lived in poverty, compared to 62% who had completed high school.⁴
- » Other Canadian studies on high school completion have also demonstrated a notable gender gap, as females who fail to graduate typically earn 20% less than their graduating counterparts.³
- » In order to complete high school pregnant and parenting teens require financial support because their immediate families may not have the financial resources to be able to help or a breakdown has occurred within the family.

While various benefits and programs are available to assist pregnant and parenting teens, access to these benefits and programs is often difficult because of:

1. Inconsistent and uncoordinated eligibility requirements,
 2. Documentation that is not aligned with their unique experiences and employment histories,
 3. Irregular processing periods and funding that is tied to the school year rather than the full year needs of the teen and her child,
 4. Access to childcare is not administered in a well-coordinated manner, resulting in further delays for the teen parent in reconnecting with her high school education.
- » Other concerns highlighted in the research contributing to lower rates of high school completion were interruptions in schooling, the lack of flexibility in the administration of benefits and the difficulty of balancing schooling with parenting expectations.

Based on research conducted by Terra Centre, a key barrier to high school completion for pregnant and parenting teens in Alberta was access to a simplified site-based funding model.

² Hankivsky, Olena (2008) *Cost Estimates of Dropping Out of High School in Canada*. Simon Fraser University

³ Human Resources Development Canada (2000) *Dropping out of High School: Definitions and Costs* Ottawa, Applied Research Branch.

⁴ Women's Leadership Council (2011) *Seeds of Success: Seeking Solutions for Teen Mothers and their Children*, United Way, Calgary and Area



The Idea

The idea was to create a Leadership Team made of representatives from the provincial government, school districts and agencies working with pregnant and parenting teens to oversee the:

1. Collaborative development of an application and approval process for a simplified site based funding model (Learner's Bursary),
2. Learner's Bursary being made available and administered with a targeted group of pregnant and parenting teens in two demonstration sites,
3. Provision of the parent portion of monthly childcare fees as part of the Learner's Bursary, and
4. Delivery of the funding coupled with a supportive and coordinated case management process.

Expected Results

The results expected from the pilot were:

- » Improved attendance and higher rates of student retention/staying in school.
- » Improved assignment completion, school engagement and self-confidence that support high school completion.
- » Higher rates of course completion/credits earned, high school graduation, and greater participation in post-secondary education and career planning.

Additional areas for observation were:

- » The identification of other factors that were significant in either inhibiting or assisting pregnant and parenting teens complete high school,
- » Analysis of the collaborative processes initiated for the demonstration project, with respect to decision-making,
- » Determination of how the Learner's Bursary might be 'taken to scale' after the conclusion of the demonstration project, in order to include pregnant and parenting teens in other communities in Alberta.



There is a strong connection between the Learners Bursary funding, the childcare support and the coordinated, supportive case management processes.

The Leadership Team

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The Leadership Team

The Leadership Team includes representatives from Alberta Human Services, Alberta Education, Edmonton Public School Board, Braemar School, Louise Dean School (Calgary Board of Education), Catholic Family Service (Calgary) and Terra Centre in Edmonton.

The Leadership Team provides a safe, supportive environment to discuss issues that emerge through the theory of change processes and works closely with the developmental evaluators in identifying, examining and interpreting the data related to students supported by the Learner's Bursary. As the demonstration project moved forward the membership of the team changed as members moved to other positions or because of a desire to include additional expertise.

Alberta Education

*Dana Antaya-Moore
Sue Bell
Mary Michailides

Alberta Human Services

*Colleen Barr
Pat Firminger
*Judith McDonald
*David Schneider
*Jennifer Weber

Edmonton Public School Board

Lorna Biddeson
Tanni Parker
*Nancy Petersen

Braemar School

*Sandra Erickson
*Tim Lavallee

Catholic Family Service

*Holly Charles
*Minh Le

Louise Dean School

*Rita Dickson
*Allison Orpe

Terra Centre for Teen Parents

*Laura Fulmer
*Karen Mottershead
*Syrell Wilson

*Mark Cabaj - Developmental Evaluator
*Peter Faid - Facilitator

*current membership

Developmental Evaluation

Developmental evaluation facilitates close to real-time feedback to program staff thus facilitating a continuous development loop based on measurable data along with observations and reflections of those involved with the day-to-day activities.

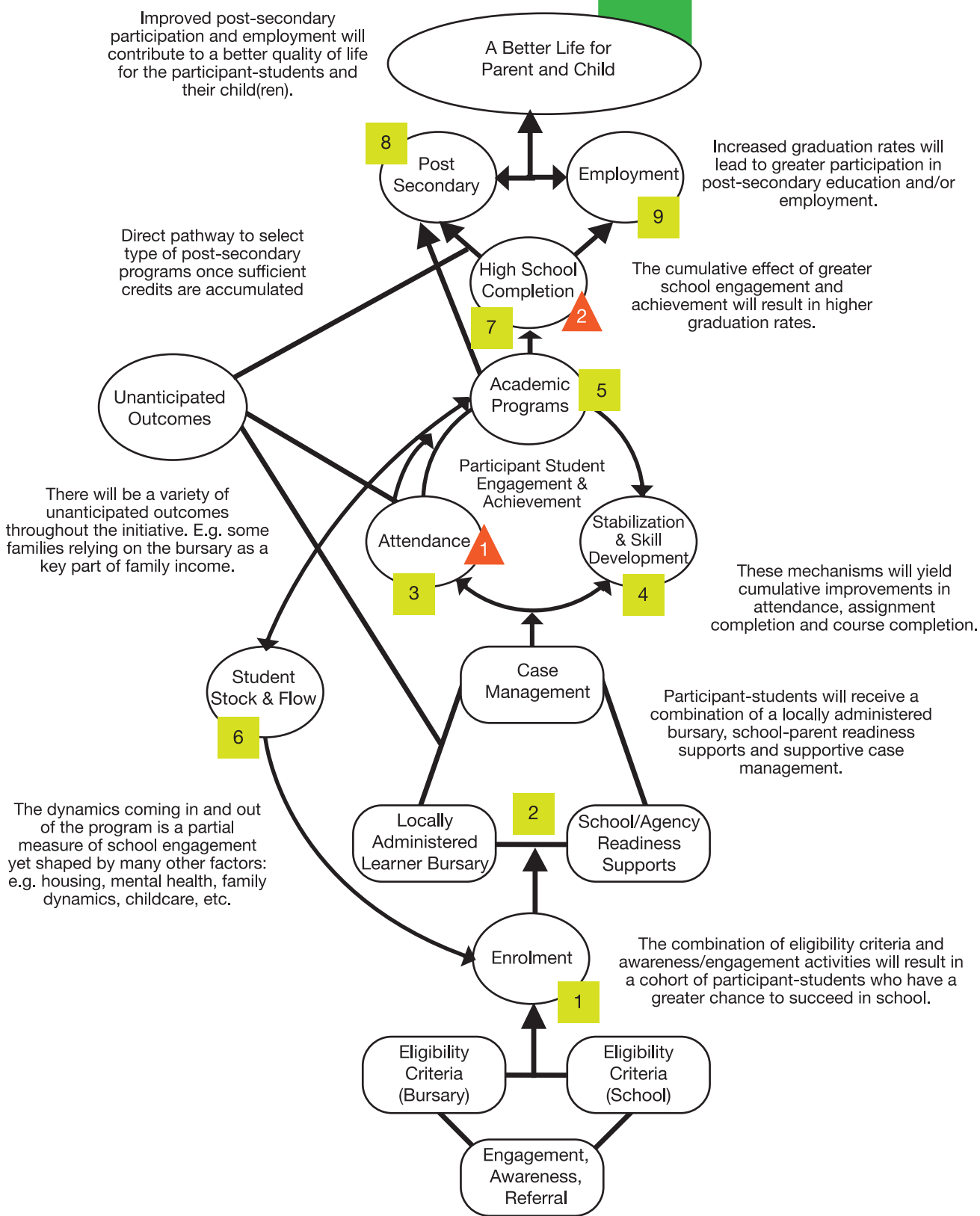
Theory of Change

Working with a theory of change helps those involved articulate their assumptions about these collaborative processes through which the desired changes are expected to occur. It illustrates the need for early and intermediate interventions directly linked to the increased high school completion rates for Learner's Bursary recipients.

It also helps predict what is going to change, over what period of time and by how much. It guides those involved to identify the steps that are necessary and the relationship between actions and outcomes.

Theory of Change

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Program Indicators

- 1 Enrollment Profile
- 2 Student Feedback (i.e. surveys, focus groups)
- 3 Attendance Statistics
- 4 APORI Responses
- 5 Credits Accumulated

Program Targets

- 1 80% Attendance rate
- 2 50% or above 3-year High School Completion Rate

- 6 Retention and In/Out Rated
- 7 High School Completion Rates
- 8 Transition to Post-Secondary Rates
- 9 Employment Status

Administrative Policies and Procedures

Terra Centre and Catholic Family Service worked cooperatively to develop suitable policies and procedures for the administration of the Learner's Bursary.

Application and Approval Process

- » The Learner's Bursary application and approval process is designed to respond within 10 business days from the time a pregnant or parenting teen expresses interest in continuing her education. There is also a bimonthly direct deposit system in place in order to minimize the waiting time for funds.
- » The eligibility requirements are that the student must already be registered in school, be at least 16 years of age, be pregnant or parenting and be able to demonstrate financial need.

Needs Assessment

- » A 'collaborative needs assessment' takes place between the school and the partner agency to ensure the necessary supports such as childcare, suitable housing and a learning plan are in place.
- » This collaborative and individualized review by the site based team of educators and agency before the biweekly or monthly funds are distributed ensures a flexible and timely response that ultimately supports staying in school.

Coordinated Case Management

- » The coordinated case management process was designed to review attendance, academic progress and life stability for each student who is receiving the Learner's Bursary, including early intervention when supports are required and when adjustments may be required in a student's learning plan.

Bridge Funding

- » The design of the Learner's Bursary also provides for 'bridge funding' when further assessment or monitoring is required to determined readiness or commitment to attend school on a full time basis.
- » Bridge funding provides core essential benefit and the parent portion of childcare costs for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 60 days. This time period allows the student an opportunity to transition into a more structured educational setting and as well access the social and emotional supports required to improve their personal life circumstances and to focus on education and parenting.





Attendance and Student Retention

- » In both schools the close working relationship between the agency programs and the schools in the administration of the Learner's Bursary has meant that there are regular opportunities to review each student's patterns of attendance and to ensure support plans are in place.
- » As a result, there is evidence that attendance for students receiving a Learner's Bursary is better than that of non-bursary students.

Attendance rate

Braemar School 2014-2015

74% Learner's Bursary

53% Non-Learner's Bursary

Louise Dean School 2014-2015

79% Learner's Bursary

55% Non-Learner's Bursary

- » The number of students disqualified from Learner's Bursary because of their inability to meet the attendance requirements, show sufficient academic progress or due to changes in their circumstances, has shown a gradual improvement over the three years.

Retention rate

- » At Louise Dean School in 2012-13, of a total of 103 students who received a Learner's Bursary, 29 were disqualified and 12 were suspended because of insufficient progress or they chose to temporarily withdraw for personal, family or health reasons. In the first five months of 2014-15, out of a total of 103 students just 10 were disqualified and 10 were suspended.
- » Over the two and a half years of the Learner's Bursary program at Louise Dean School, of a total of 334 students who received financial support, a total of 66 (20%) students were disqualified, for an overall retention rate of 80%.
- » Throughout the three years of the Learner Bursary initiative at Louise Dean School 38 students were moved to bridge funding for stabilization while a similar number were reinstated to full funding.
- » The retention rate for Braemar School was not as high. The records showed that from 2012-2015 a total of 230 students were disqualified, for a retention rate of 50%.
- » In an average month at Braemar School in the first two years 15 students were on bridge funding, while the education support services worked with the student to overcome some of the difficulties that they were encountering.

Demonstration Site	Learner's Benefit 2008-2010	Learner's Bursary 2012-2014	Approved Students
Braemar School	168	457	+172%
Louise Dean School	189	334	+76%



The Outcomes

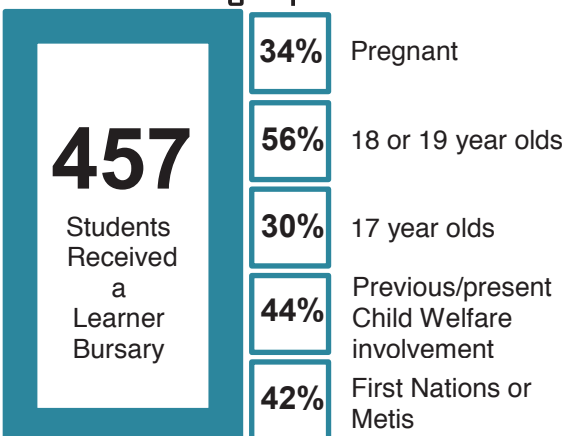
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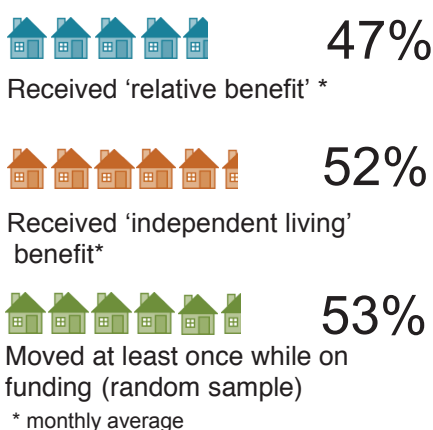
Braemar School Terra Centre

Learner's Bursary □ September 2012 □ March 2015

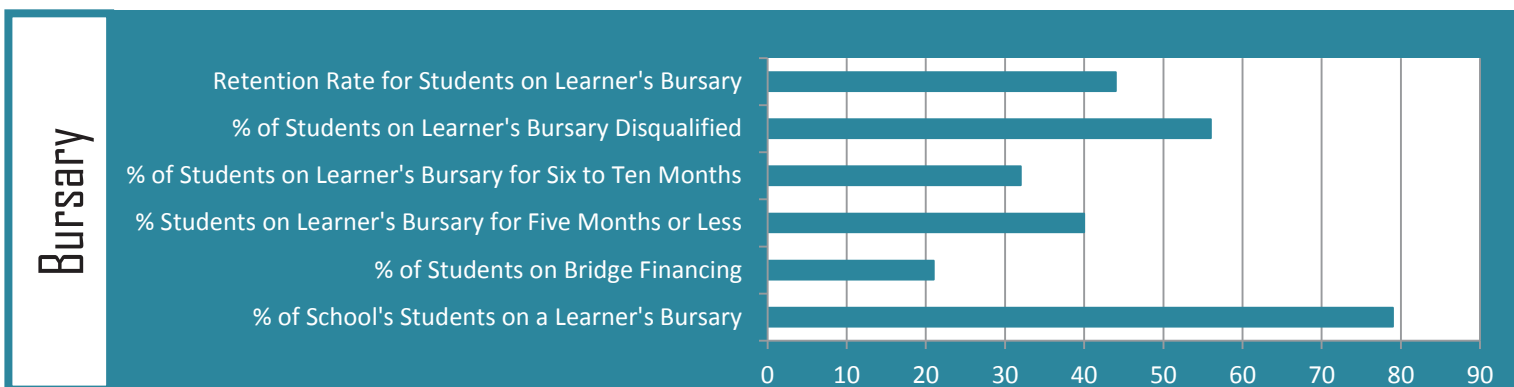
Some Demographics



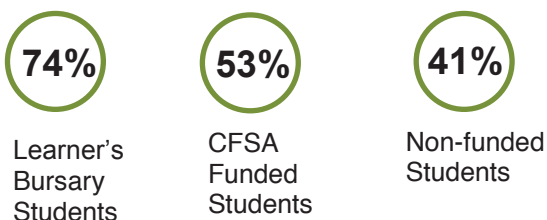
Accommodations



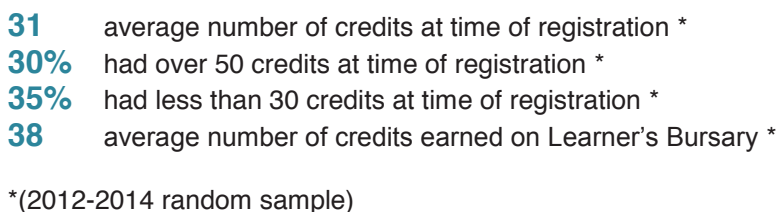
Life Challenges



Attendance



Credits Earned



Graduation

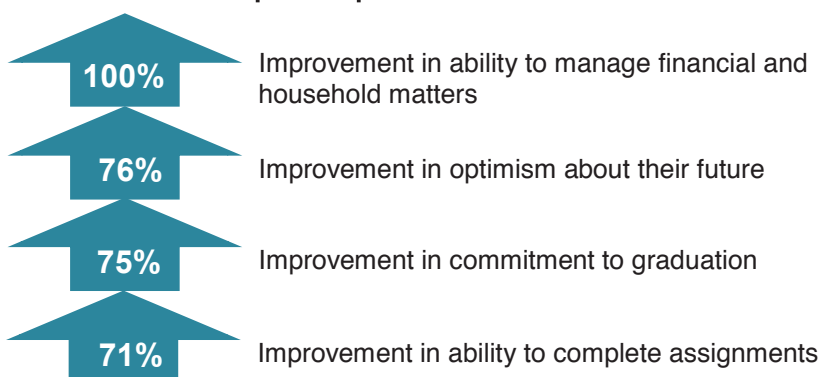


of those eligible to graduate within the year did so (2012 - 2013)



transitioned out because of their age (43) (2012-2015)

Focus Group Responses



The Outcomes

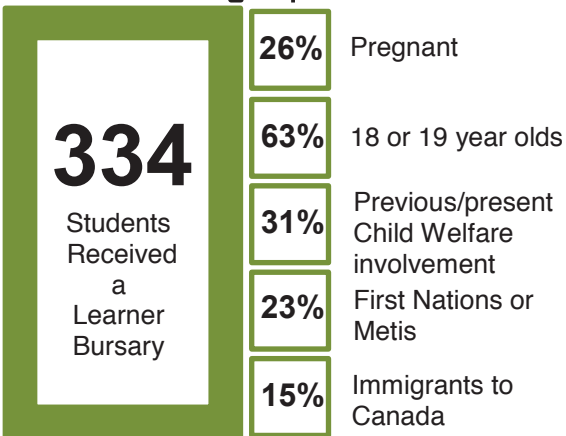
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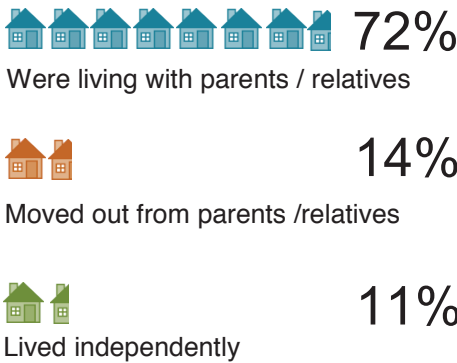
Louise Dean School Catholic Family Service

Learner's Bursary □ September 2012 □ January 2015

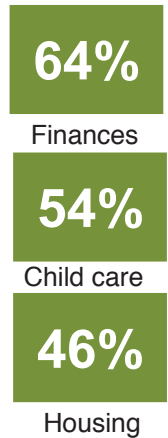
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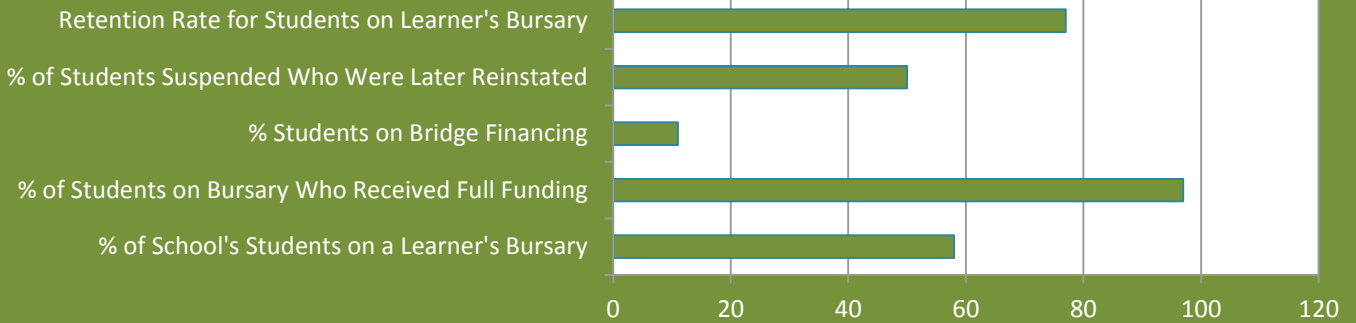
Accommodations



Instrumental Concerns



Bursary



Attendance

82%

52%

Learner's Bursary Students Non-funded Students

Success with Credits Earned

65% exceeded the success factor formula*

$$\frac{\text{Number of earned credits}}{\text{Number of required credits}} \times \frac{\text{number of month receiving learners bursary}}{\text{Number of eligible months}} \times 100\%$$

74% of students who were on Learners Bursary over two years were more successful in their second year

Graduation



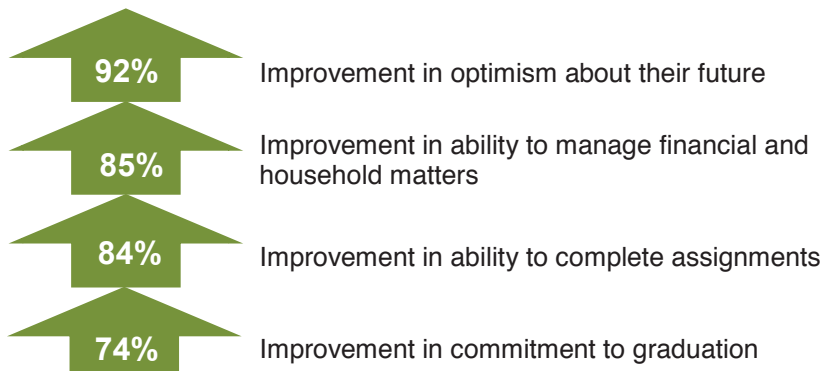
of those eligible to graduate within the year did so 53) (2012 - 2014)



8%

transitioned out because of their age (16) (2012-2014)

Focus Group Responses





School Engagement

- » From the information gathered through focus groups, students at Louise Dean School felt that they were now much more optimistic about their future, they had a stronger commitment to their graduation, they had strengthened their ability to complete assignments and as well were now more capable than a year ago in managing their financial and household matters.
- » Similarly, students at Braemar School felt much better about their chances of succeeding in school and in life, and they were even more determined to provide a positive future for their sons and daughters.
- » At both schools students spoke of an improved commitment to their education and the new self-confidence they had gained as a result of their efforts.

- » In 2013-14 29 students at Louise Dean School were identified at the start of the year of as being potentially able to achieve 100 credits and graduate. Of this group, 26 did graduate (90%), all of whom had received a Learner's Bursary. Similarly 96% of those graduating in 2104-15 (40 students) received a Learner's Bursary. A further 12 students transitioned out because of their age, but just 2 were in receipt of a Learner's Bursary.
- » At Braemar School in 2013-14 there were 40 students at the start of the school year who had the potential to earn 100 credits and graduate. Of that original number 33 (83%) achieved their high school diploma. As well 10 transitioned out because of their age and 9 of the students did so with more than 80 credits.

Greater participation in post-secondary education and career planning

Louise Dean School

At Louise Dean School in 2012-13 of the 31 graduates or students transitioning, 12 (39%) were accepted into a post-secondary program. In 2013-14, 22 (58%) of the same group of students were able to enter a post-secondary program while in 2014-15 of the 44 graduates or students transitioning 23 (52%) continued into a post-secondary program.

Braemar School

At Braemar School in 2013-14 of the 50 graduates or students transitioning, 28 (56%) indicated that they planned to enter a post-secondary program.





Social Programs Delivery

The initiative addressed aspects of five important areas of social policy in Alberta:

1. high school completion,
2. aboriginal education,
3. early childhood development,
4. children and youth at risk, and
5. poverty.

The opportunity for community programs to provide a Learner's Bursary to those who are eligible, offers an example of how social policies could unfold in Alberta over the next decade with community programs and schools being responsible stewards of the public funding.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

- » In the initial stages the two participating programs worked together to develop a simplified application form to gather standardized information that was directly relevant to the background and needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The same application information was used for assessing the eligibility for both the Learner's Bursary and childcare support.
- » As a result of the standardized application form, the waiting period between applying and returning to school has been reduced to 10 business days.

Eligibility

- » Access to financial support for pregnant and parenting teens has been dramatically enhanced as a result of the introduction of the Learner's Bursary. Before the introduction of the program pregnant teens were not eligible for financial support and were unlikely to continue their education. Over the past two and a half years 157 pregnant teens in Edmonton and 99 in Calgary, most of who were at risk of dropping out, were able to register for high school.
- » Older teens that were likely to 'age out' before completing the required credits for graduation were also often

judged to be ineligible for financial support. Forty three older teens in Edmonton and 16 in Calgary were able to continue with their high school education.

- » Thirty eight percent of the teens eligible for a Learner's Bursary were new to any form of financial assistance. The two months of paid maternity leave for teen mothers provides a real connection to continue their education.

Needs Assessment

- » The school administrators at both sites noted the flexibility and responsiveness of the Learner Bursary approach, especially as it supports on-going school intake rather than requiring entry at the start of the semesters.
- » The educators observed that this flexibility is an essential requirement for working with at risk school populations. The site based funding allows for monies to be deferred, or limited to bridge funding, if academic progress or attendance is slipping. It also allows for cheque splitting, with two pay cheques each month to assist the students with budgeting.
- » Other indicators of the additional flexibility in the Learner's Bursary program is that 16 and 17 year olds are now eligible for funding regardless of their place of residence, provided the housing is considered to be safe. At Louise Dean School a two week 'transition pay' is available to students so that they can transition into employment without defaulting on bills.

Where unique individual circumstances have arisen for which there were no suitable guidelines Alberta Human Services – Regional Support Services have been willing to provide consultation and useful policy examples.





Housing and Child Care

- » Housing issues and childcare concerns remain.

Unintended Benefits

Daily Expenses

- » Requests for diapers, formula, food vouchers and food have dropped over the period that the Learner's Bursary has been available. Requests for help with finances and additional food have shown similar decreases.

Food Bank

- » Less demand for the support of food banks. At Louise Dean School the number of referrals to the Calgary Food Bank dropped from 101 in 2012-13 to 39 between September 2013 and August 2014.

Family Dynamics

- » There is evidence that the availability of the Learner's Bursary has sometimes changed the dynamics of a family.
- » In some situations other family members beyond the young mother and the child, have benefited from the availability of the Learner's Bursary.

Independence

- » The availability of the bursary has enabled some parenting teens to move out of their parents or relative's home to live independently. In addition to building self-confidence the move to independence has in some cases improved the relationship of the teen parent with her own parent(s).

"The Learners Bursary has really helped. I signed up as soon as I was 16 and I got the funds within a week, which was fast."



Our Conclusion



The transfer of responsibility for assessing eligibility for the Learner's Bursary to the two demonstration sites has been a success. The experiences have served to reinforce that both government and non-governmental agencies, working together in partnership, bring increased expertise in the development of social policy and in the delivery of effective services.

Both programs have found the first three years of the administration of the Learners Bursary, with its simplified and site based application and approval process, to be at times challenging but always very rewarding. The prompt access to financial support, the availability of critical 'wrap-around' services and the strengthened collaborative relationships between the schools and the agencies have all been important elements in the success of the initiative.

The opportunity for pregnant and parenting teens to quickly gain access to school, with the necessary financial resources all in place, have been shown to strengthen their engagement with their education through improved attendance, higher academic performance and a greater determination to graduate from high school; with the earnest desire to be able to provide a more positive future for their son or daughter.

The Learner's Bursary is a necessary requirement for achieving the desired outcomes of our proposed theory of change.

To realize increased high school completion rates requires the alignment of the Learner's Bursary with the commitment of school staff as well as community based agencies that are dedicated to providing flexible and responsive 'wrap-around' services.

"Discovering that I was capable of supporting a child, managing a household as well as doing well in school, makes me feel that I can do anything I put my mind to."

