

# ZERO CEILING PROGRAM REVIEW

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Zero Ceiling **reduces youth homelessness and raises the quality of life** for young people experiencing homelessness from Vancouver through the Sea to Sky Corridor. Zero Ceiling provides **housing, employment and professional support that empowers** young people with effective, practical tools to live healthy and independent lives. Through **adventure-based learning**, Zero Ceiling provides opportunities for young people to experience mountain life and **cultivate healthy, purposeful direction in their lives**.

## CONTEXT

The Work 2 Live program is a comprehensive 12-month program that provides **subsidized housing, employment, adventure-based learning, and ongoing professional support**. Participants aged 19 to 24 benefit from stable and affordable housing, allowing them to focus on aspects of the program that **promote personal growth and a healthy lifestyle**. In partnership with Whistler Blackcomb, Zero Ceiling provides employment, enabling participants to gain valuable skills and experience and **develop the resources to live independently**.

The program objectives are as follows:

- **Access employment and independent living in a supportive environment.**
- **Develop the necessary life skills to live independent, autonomous, healthy lives, free of government support.**
- **Make informed decisions and develop autonomy.**
- **Take advantage of progressive programming that evolves along side the needs of Work 2 Live participants.**

Since inception there have been:

- 85 participants,
- over 12,000 nights of housing provided,
- over 60,000 hours worked, and
- over 17,000 hours of professional support supplied.

The purpose of this program review was to gain an understanding of the Work 2 Live components, and associated outcomes, that are found valuable and/or challenging to the participants both in the short and long term, concluding in recommendations for program improvement and sustainability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The **Work 2 Live program is unique in its collection of intervention strategies**. However, elements of its programming are found in a variety of programs around the world. As the intended outcomes can be ethereal and perceived as 'soft', it is important to focus on their efficacy and relevancy.

In general terms, structural, developmental and societal influences intersect to increase youth's risk of poverty. Again, **structural and societal issues, alongside personal issues converge to exasperate the risk of homelessness** for youth and the risks youth experiencing homelessness may face (Baskin, 2007). "Homelessness is experienced differently by different people, often in accordance with the unique constellation of individual, social and structural factors that shape their lives" (Guirguis-Younger, McNeil, & Hwang, 2014, p.2). **The trajectories leading people to experience homelessness in the first instance and to continue to experience homelessness are multifaceted** (Morrell-Bellai, Goering, & Boydell, 2000).



## Housing

Canadian studies have, like several other jurisdictions, favored harm reduction and housing first models (Schiff, & Turner, 2014). **A housing first model assumes that entrenched homelessness is multidimensional and often involves people experiencing multiple issues beyond homelessness.** It proposes that housing needs to be secured before mental health, trauma, employment or addiction issues can effectively be addressed.

Some studies have asked people experiencing homelessness what their key issues or concerns are. These studies provide useful insight into some of the multifaceted and interrelated issues facing young people experiencing homelessness, and also how they prioritize them. One Canadian study explores the quality of life measures purported by people experiencing homelessness and hard-to-house Canadians between the ages of 15 and 73 (Palepa, Hubley, Russel, Gadermann & Chinni, 2012). The respondents' answers relate to six themes: **health care, living conditions, finances, relationships, employment, and recreation and leisure.** Those who did not have housing generally note a lower level of quality of life. The study suggests that securing housing is seen as important, but the quality of the housing is also important.

## Employment and education

Homelessness presents a barrier to employment and education. One significant barrier is a lack of an address, necessary for most employment opportunities. As a result, **youth experiencing homelessness have lower rates of formal employment and some depend on the informal economy.** Palepa et al (2012) suggest that employment acts as both an economic stabilizer, but also positively impacts a sense of identity. Robinson (2008) notes that **all young people in the study asked about work said they also wanted work or education to keep them occupied.**

Agencies working with youth highlight many barriers. Robinson finds that **role models are an important motivator for obtaining and sustaining employment.** He also finds that an advocate to support young people through barriers is helpful.

## Support services

Youth experiencing homelessness are **more likely to have suffered some form of trauma and they are more likely to have experienced depression, post-traumatic stress disorder** and emotional or behavioural problems.

Studies [investigating support services] highlight the importance of **addressing numerous social and psychological issues in tandem with physical issues.** They support the notion that programs **need to recognize a holistic view of the people they work with.** There is also an important strand that runs through some academic literature focusing on homelessness and social justice issues. For instance, Watson & Cuervo (2017) articulate the importance of supporting youth to tackle the stigma they face and to understand the systemic issues at play impacting their lives.

## Adventure-based Learning

Several meta-analyses have illustrated statistically significant outcomes across a range of factors including **improved self-concept and self-esteem, increased pro social behavior, improved cognitive autonomy** (Mutz & Müller, 2016; Romi & Kohan, 2014), **increased resilience** (Ritchie, Wabano, Russell, Enosse, & Young, 2014), **amplified leadership, and improved community engagement.** Attesting to the degree of change, Deane and Harré (2013) find that across multiple studies, participants of adventure or outdoor based interventions were 62% better off post-program.

## Conclusion

None of the literature specifically or individually addresses the same conditions experienced by Zero Ceiling and its participants, but collectively the findings provide some insight into elements of support that increase the likelihood of sustainable outcomes for young people. The findings illustrate that **the combination of services provided by Work 2 Live have been illustrated to help participants of similar programs.**



## DATA COLLECTION

All data collection was conducted between August and October 2017, and involved document compilation, an online survey of graduates, focus groups and individual interviews with representatives from stakeholder groups.

The data collected was primarily qualitative in nature, with some demographic information included for survey participants.

## SURVEY DATA

In the survey and written interviews, the **comments were generally very positive** with participants noting how the Work 2 Live program **increased their feeling of stability** by providing them with access to employment and housing.

Participants also noted that the program had the **capacity to increase confidence and transform lives by creating a space for them to grow as individuals and meet their personal goals**. The physical environment in which the participants worked and lived was also noted as a positive attribute of the program, as was the support received from Zero Ceiling

## STRENGTHS

The Work 2 Live program:

- Is well supported by, and **connected to the community**;
- Is a **good fit** for the location, employers and participants;
- Employs staff who are **well qualified, committed and passionate**. They provide effective and tailored support to the participants;
- Is **responsive** to the needs of its partners, its participants and the broader community;
- Has a structure which **supports program completion**; and
- Has a good balance between support and independence and **creates a sense of “family”**.

## AREAS FOR GROWTH

Focus groups and interviews identified these opportunities for growth:

- **Refine program structure** and delivery;
- Formalize **accountability** processes;
- **Diversify** participants and partners
- **Strengthen transition** into and out of the program to ensure staff have the appropriate tools and resources to assist participants
- Develop **strategic support** for all stakeholders
- Explore options for **program expansion**
- Consider **impact of the Whistler environment** and explore participants' connection to place
- Ensure **long-term sustainability**

## SUMMARY

The organization has developed a **strong program with an impressive reputation**. Zero Ceiling is well-supported in the local community and graduates speak in very positive terms of their experiences.

In summary, we concluded that Zero Ceiling and the Work 2 Live program have been **very successful in positively impacting the lives of the program participants**. While there is some room for improvement, the organization and the program are very effectively fulfilling its goal to reduce youth homelessness and raise the quality of life for young people from Vancouver through the Sea to Sky corridor.