

Summary Evaluation Findings

Four Pillars Supported Employment Project 2008

Prepared for
**Drug Policy Program
City of Vancouver**

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Background

The Four Pillars Supported Employment Project (FPSE) provides temporary employment with the City of Vancouver to persons in recovery from drug use.

Rationale

Recovering drug users need support to prevent relapse. Evidence points to a clear link between unemployment and damaging behaviours, including harmful substance use. Employment is a protective factor that promotes resilience for vulnerable populations at risk from harmful substance use. Employment assistance and training programs are needed to target vulnerable individuals during the process of recovery.

Goals and Objectives

The project goal is to assist drug users in the recovery process and to prevent them from relapsing by supporting their transition into the workplace. Project objectives are:

- To provide recovering drug users with job-related training such as life and social skills, work ethics and discipline;
- To offer them paid employment with the City of Vancouver for a period of up to six months;
- To assist them in finding post-project long term employment.

Eligible individuals are employable persons in recovery from drug use who are willing to assume responsibilities of professional work. This is a high threshold program, requiring participants to be alert, productive, responsible and committed. The project was piloted in 2007. FPSE took place from May to October 2008.

Project Partners

2008 project partners were the City Engineering departments of Streets, Waterworks and Sewer Operations, the City's Drug Policy Program (DPP), and EMBERS Staffing Solutions, (ESS) a local employment support agency based in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Evaluation

In 2008 the project was evaluated using a qualitative, outcome based, and participatory approach. Evaluation outcomes and success indicators were developed with input from project partners and workers. The project evaluator developed an evaluation framework, logic model and evaluation tools. Data was gathered through interviews with project partners and workers. A final report was prepared.

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Activities

- Four full time equivalent positions were made available in three CoV Engineering departments for shared use by seven workers from May 26 through to October 7, 2008. Waterworks and Sewer Operations were partners for the 2007 Pilot Project and signed on again for 2008. They were

¹ For a copy of the final report please contact Project Coordinator, Zarina Mulla, Drug Policy Program, City of Vancouver, Phone: 604-871-6481, E-mail: zarina.mulla@vancouver.ca www.vancouver.ca/fourpillars

joined this year by Streets. City departments provided job orientation, safety training and supervision for workers. Managers and other staff attended various meetings to plan, problem-solve as necessary, and to review evaluation findings.

- The ESS Job Coach screened and recruited workers, provided job orientation, and training in life skills, financial literacy and first aid, as well as providing coaching and support to workers throughout their employment period. ESS also liaised with CoV project partners around worker progress and any needed problem-solving.
- The Drug Policy Program Project Coordinator provided project administration and oversight.

Outputs

- Three of eight workers (37%) completed 14 full weeks of employment.
- Five workers completed 12, 10, 8, 7.5 and 6 weeks of employment respectively.
- Four of eight workers (50%) went on to full time employment when their work period was over.
- Two of these workers were offered full time employment by the CoV Engineering department they had worked in.

Outcomes

- All workers were rated by employers to have met the major outcome of reaching a typical employment ready condition by the end of their involvement with the project.
- All workers maintained life stability while employed, shown through attendance at project meetings and training, making life plans, saving money, and workplace punctuality.
- Workers' self esteem increased and their life situations improved while involved with the project.
- Two of eight workers (25%) relapsed at the end of their employment.
- Project partners rated satisfaction with their working relationship at 3.3 out of 5
- Project partners rated their satisfaction with the project overall at 4.4 out of 5.

Project Strengths and Challenges

Project strengths include:

- the recruiting process and ongoing support to workers and employers from the job coach at ESS, the employment support agency;
- the provision of well paid work by the City, along with supervision and training from the staff in Streets, Waterworks, and Sewer Operations;
- the high level of support to the project from CoV Department Managers;
- the strong desire of the workers to do the best they could at their jobs, and their success at doing so.

Project challenges were:

- the unexpected departure of the ESS Job Coach two thirds of the way through the time period;
- communication/information challenges experienced by project partners due to a lack of clarity, in some circumstances, about appropriate procedures to follow, and people to contact;
- the staggered start and end dates of worker employment in the three departments which brought challenges to project and worker management, and to the timing of support and training from the employment support agency.

Additional Findings

- While all workers were grateful for their work experience, several found themselves less suited to the available labouring and construction-oriented jobs, as did their employers. For example, one worker recruited for this project, although willing to take on the labour-intensive work, was more suited for a clerical or IT job, another had more experience in landscaping.
- There is an ongoing challenge in supporting workers in a project such as this to manage their hopes of full time work with the city at the project's end. The balance is in reinforcing for workers that the project intention is for workers to experience a transition to full time work, good wages, and some stability through this temporary employment, while also encouraging them to work hard and well in order to prove employment worth, and to ensure their receipt of at least a good job reference. Hope is a great motivator.

Evaluation Recommendations

Nine recommendations emerge from the evaluation data and they fall into the following three areas.

1. Workers' and CoV Engineering Department experience with employment, and worker recovery.
2. Support provided by the employment support agency to workers and employers.
3. Overall project process.

1. The evaluation recommends that continuing care be taken to place workers who have the appropriate basic skills and aptitude necessary for the openings available. This process would be helped by having the agency responsible for locating and placing workers observe the various City of Vancouver departmental worksites prior to assigning workers there.

2. That the City of Vancouver consider opening a wider range of suitable work placements for project employment candidates. For example, after two years of involvement, the City of Vancouver Engineering project partners observed that some participants were better suited for work in the Parks Department, and they strongly recommend that the Parks Department join the project.

3. That if feasible, the project arrange for the same employment start and end dates for all City of Vancouver departments involved.

4. That the Job Coach be more consistently available to workers and employers throughout the project and for several weeks after the project, and that this person *proactively* communicate weekly (more, when necessary) with workers and bi-weekly (more, as necessary) with employers and the Drug Policy Program Project Coordinator.

5. That worker training and lifeskills workshops scheduled for longer than one day's duration take place prior to employment start-up. Planning for this would be eased if all workers started project employment at the same time.

6. That the employment support agency review the timing and number of worker training workshops and support groups to ensure that worker needs are effectively met.

7. That continued care be taken by the employment support agency to assist workers in managing their expectations about the potential of post-project full time employment with the City. This support is especially needed around the employment end point. Additionally, workers should be

informed that when the project is over they are all welcome to pick up job references from their employer, and to apply if they wish, for employment with the City.

8. That common procedural guidelines for these temporary workers be developed for use by project partners (City of Vancouver Engineering, Drug Policy Program, employment support agency). The guidelines should include procedures to follow in the case of unexplained worker absence, the need to contact workers, concerns about suspected substance abuse on the job, relevant CoV policies, and worker injury. Development and distribution of the guidelines should be the responsibility of CoV's Drug Policy Program Project Coordinator.

9. That a complete contact list of "who's who in the support agency, the Department, and the worksite" be drawn up by the DPP Project Coordinator shortly after workers have been placed. Further, that, electronic and paper copies of this contact list be provided to all appropriate levels of each CoV department involved, levels (managers, relevant foremen, supervisors etc.), and to all staff in the job support agency.