

# Parkdale Food Centre

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## EVALUATION REPORT YEAR 1

Written by the Students Commission of Canada

### Project Description

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Parkdale Food Centre is a non-profit organization that is committed to combating chronic food and financial insecurity. At the core of their philosophy is the belief that access to nutritious, wholesome food is an inherent human right, a cornerstone in the edifice of positive physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Through various programming, Parkdale Food Centre engage youth who are seeking employment and professional development opportunities within the context of social change. This evaluation report will focus on two programs: Growing Futures, and TH1RTE3N (13:ASE). They offer workshops and tools to address local issues within their respective communities of Ottawa and equip youth with the professional skills, knowledge and confidence to go into the workforce and business ventures.

### Methodology

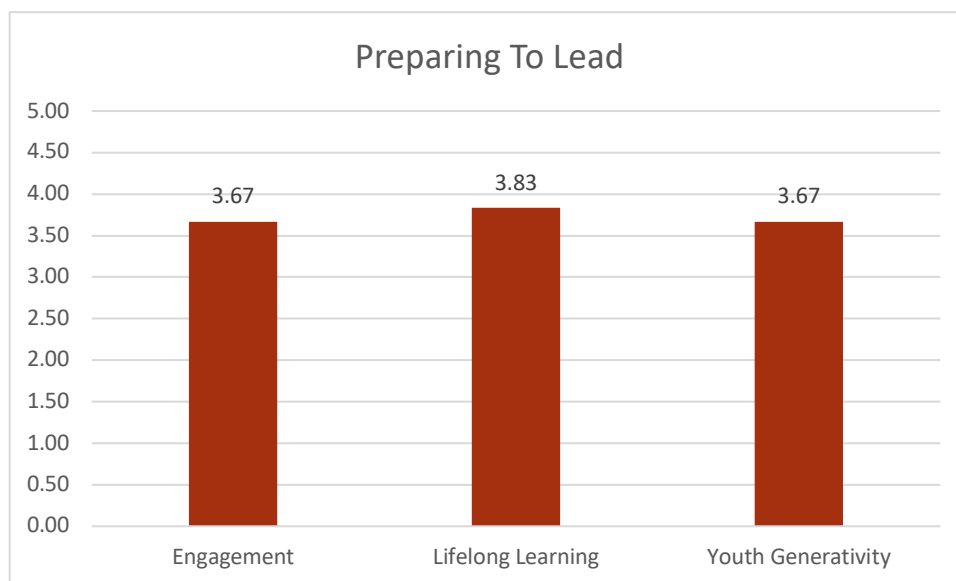
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Parkdale Food Centre has collaborated with the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) through their Sharing the Stories (StS) program, which offers customizable evaluation for non-profits serving youth. Together, they are working to ensure that the Parkdale Food Centre continues to support communities across Ottawa who experience chronic food and income insecurity, as well as providing programming for youth who are seeking professional development in the context of social change. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the impact of programming on the lives of youth participants who were involved in TH1RTE3N (13:ASE) and Growing Futures workshops.

For this evaluation, youth completed both qualitative (Focus Group) and quantitative (Preparing to Lead) surveys to yield robust data that speak to their experience with their respective professional development programming. In short, the results indicate that youth fostered a positive sense of self when engaging with adults and peers, developed new skills, and are focused on engaging in ongoing learning opportunities to build more skills within the labour market.

# Preparing to Lead Survey

The Preparing to Lead survey focuses on youth leadership and investigates three themes: Engagement, Lifelong Learning, and Youth Generativity. This survey poses 25 questions that youth are asked to respond to on a five-point scale: Not at all (1), A little bit (2), Moderately (3), A lot (4), and Completely (5). Participants were asked to answer all the questions at the end of the programming cycle to reflect on their experience. The survey examines the extent to which youth participating in a program experience key qualities of meaningful youth engagement, and leadership that are associated with positive outcomes. The following graph illustrates the average scores for youth who participated in the program (n=8).



## Takeaways for Preparing to Lead

- **Engagement:** This section of the assessment contains 14 questions investigating participant's views after the completion of the program. Out of the 8 participants who were involved with the program, 3 completed this section of the assessment. Youth indicated that after the program, youth and staff maintained a positive relationship, as they trusted each other and learned a lot from working together. Youth demonstrated strong engagement, as they were encouraged to express their ideas and opinions, and they get to make decisions about the things they want to do. This is evidenced with youth reporting an average of 4.7 out of a 5-point scale for the questions "I am learning new skills", and "I am encouraged and supported to solve problems in new ways".
- **Lifelong Learning:** This section of the survey contains 8 questions and probes the participants about their relationship, confidence, and futures regarding learning. From this survey, we can take away that youth had a positive relationship with the learning processes. Out of 8 participants 3 filled out the survey and reported a

score of 4 out of 5 for “I expect to go on learning for a long time” and “I like to learn about things that really matter to me.”. These responses demonstrate that youth valued the educational component of the programming and hoped to continue capturing opportunities for growth and learning.

- **Youth Generativity:** This section of the survey contains 3 questions and asks the participants about the legacy they hope to foster and leave for future generations. The biggest takeaway from this section is that youth are deeply motivated to help their peers, and younger people. On the 5-point scale youth averaged a score of 4 for “I feel it is important to help people younger than myself.” and reported an average score of 3.67 for “thinking of way to ways to help others become leaders”. Overall, these scores demonstrate that youth had an overall positive experience of the program which offers them opportunities to prepare themselves to lead and foster ongoing learning and opportunities to build more skills.

## Qualitative Results

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Parkdale Food Centre held a focus group with youth participants (n=6) in order to gain insight on their experiences and the impact of programming. The following qualitative analysis illustrates the key themes which came up, and quotes taken from participants.

### *Learning*

Throughout the focus group interviews, a common thread emerged when discussing youth experiences – their relationship and confidence with learning novel skills. Participants in the TH1RTE3N (13:ASE) and Growing Futures program not only were equipped with new skills in regard to business and entrepreneurship, but they also learned new information, or new resources that are available to them. This program introduced them to mentors, peers, business models, and readily available business opportunities for them to take advantage of. Furthermore, youth noted that they enjoyed that the programming was current and in line with the contemporary business landscape. Hosting workshops to break into E-commerce such as Etsy was also a highlight for one of the youths.

*“I learned a lot of business experience.”*

### *Belonging*

The participants mentioned that throughout the program, they felt like they belonged in their groups and shared that they felt comfortable sharing ideas, experiences, and plans. Furthermore, two youth expressed that they made cultural connections with other participants who shared their Congolese background. This made them feel welcomed and enjoyed the inclusive and diverse perspective of the program.

*“Some of the common elements is the spices – found a connection through food. Made a friend who is from Congo, and I am from Cong so that is a commonality.”*

## Diversity

Youth expressed how diverse the business workshops and their working groups were. This diversity of thought, experiences, and cultural background enabled folks to gather different perspectives and approach new skills and resources with a flexible attitude. Moreover, youth expressed feeling comfortable and energized to continue going to programming because they had made friends with similar cultural backgrounds.

*“There is a lot of diversity in that people have different backgrounds, come from different groups and have different opinions. The program facilitated this diversity by being for everybody.”*

*“The role of diversity is that it allows for youth who are seen as irresponsible the opportunity to have a job and beat those stereotypes.”*

*“Everyone was very different, but it allowed for nice conversation and made for a complimentary team.”*

## Entrepreneurship

Youth enjoyed how the program introduced them to different business models that were compatible with the contemporary business landscape. Workshops regarding E-commerce, local markets, and business promotion were expressed by 4 youth. Furthermore, youth felt confident navigating the business landscape with the teachings they received and were looking forward to more programming from Parkdale Food Centre.

*“Could sell my art on and helped me set up an account.”*

*“When we sealed spices or even made t-shirts. Being in thirteen helped change [their] career path.”*

*“[Youth] stuck between a couple of options and talking to the group made them realize what [their] dream truly was.”*

*“I did not know I could be so good at selling things.”*

## Discussion and Conclusion

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Centering nutritious and accessible food as the cornerstone of their programming, Parkdale Food Centre hopes to continue combatting chronic economic and food insecurity among marginalized populations and fostering the entrepreneurial spirit among youth. The results from the evaluation suggest that Parkdale Food Centre succeeded in creating a unique space for youth to develop entrepreneurial skills, feel supported by staff and peers, and work within the context of social change. Participants learned about E-commerce business models, brainstormed business ideas, and feel confident marketing their items to the public. Overall, Parkdale Food Centre has had a positive impact on the lives of the youth that were a part of the TH1RTE3N and Growing Futures program.

The results from the Preparing to Lead and focus group interview data speak to youths' eagerness to learn new business skills and facilitate knowledge mobilization within their communities. Furthermore, youth reported that they are committed to lifelong learning and that this was fostered by positive relationships with the program facilitators. Positive engagement strategies that youth noted include problem solving, implementing buddy system, and allowing youth to feel independent. A youth mentioned that they felt understood and supported when they had to navigate a racist incident. The facilitator acted quickly and implemented a 'buddy system' to mitigate negative interactions, and to ensure that all youth felt supported even when staff weren't within the immediate area. Youth further expressed that they enjoyed the mental wellbeing aspect of the program – facilitators checked in with youth to make sure they felt supported. One youth said that they had an overall positive experience and attributed this to the staff, saying that "they are friendly and respectful; kind, understanding, interested in my day". Lastly, most youth enjoyed the honoraria component of programming – expressing that this relieved some of the financial burden of participating in programming and made it low barrier for folks who experience financial insecurity.

Throughout this report, it is evident that the Future Growers and TH1RTE3N succeeded in nurturing youth's interest in business as well as addressing food as a human right. Youth voice gathered in this baseline report can help to better understand the reality of these youth, the impact of such a program, and can help to develop and improve similar programs that are beneficial for youth. Our recommendation is to discuss the present results with youth in the community to see if this data portrays what they are experiencing.

